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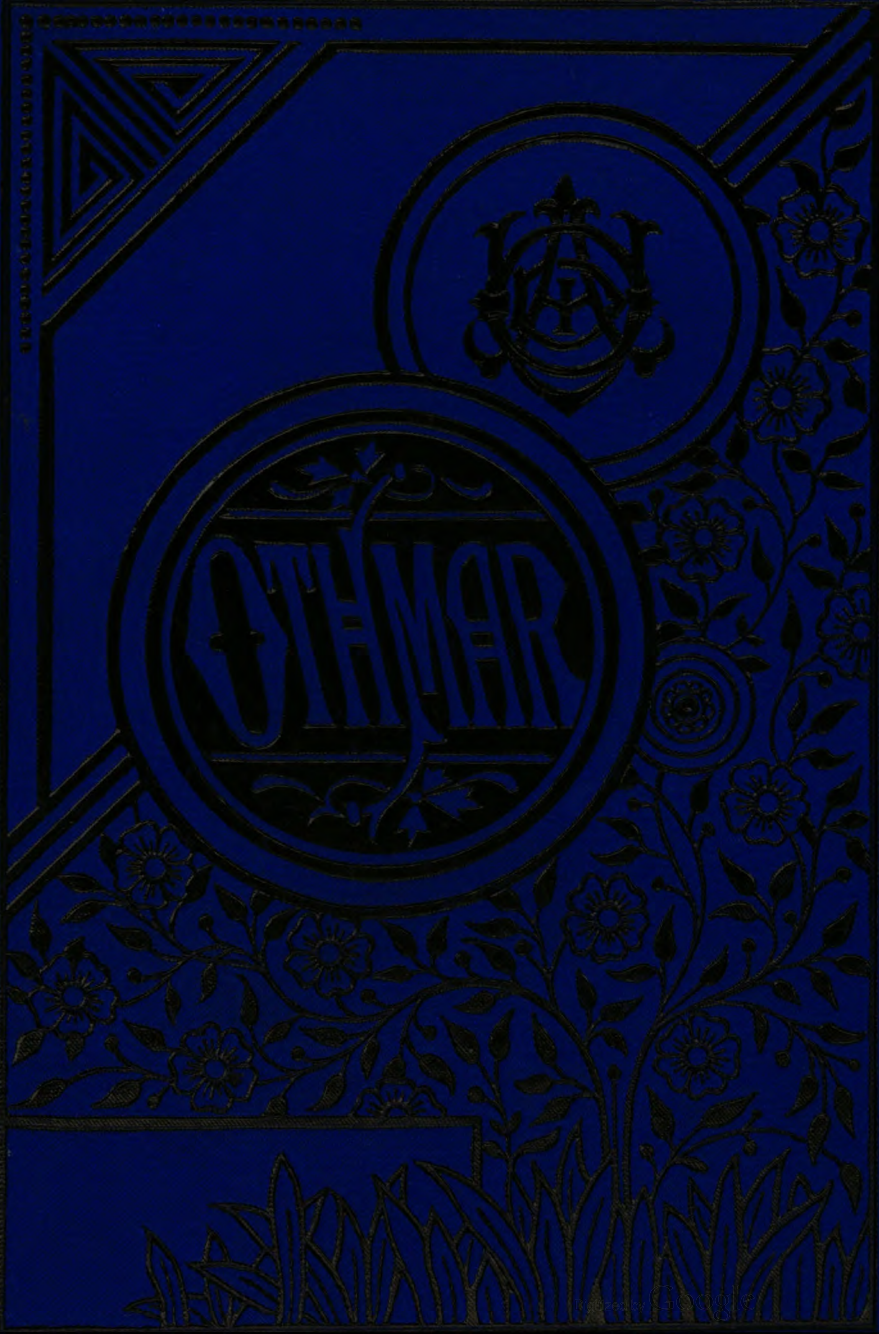
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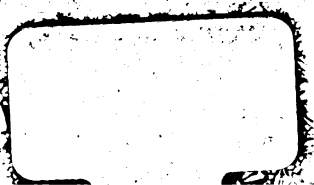
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'I fear Life's many changes; not Death's changelessness'

LYTTON



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

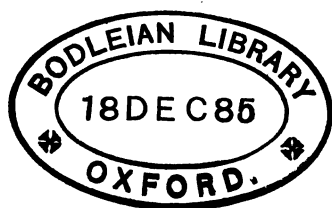
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OTHMAR.

CHAPTER I.

UNDER the forest-trees of a stately place there was held a Court of Love, in imitation and revival of those pretty pageantries and tournaments of tongues which were the chief social and royal diversion of the Italy of Lucrezia Borgia and the France of Marguerite de Valois.

It was a golden August afternoon, towards the close of a day which had been hot, fragrant, full of lovely lights and shadows. Throned on a hill a mighty castle rose, aerial, fantastic, stately, with its colonnades of stone rose-garlanded, and its stone staircases descending into bowers of foliage and foam of flowers. Its steep roofs were as sheets of silver in the sun, its many windows caught the red glow from the west, and its bastions shelved

downward to meet smooth-shaven lawns and thickets of oleanders luxuriant with blossom, crimson, white, or blush-colour. In the woods around, the oaks and beeches were heavy with their densest leafage; the deer couched under high canopies of bracken and osmunda; and the wild boars, sunk deep in tangles of wild clematis and beds of meadow-sweet, were too drowsy in the mellow warmth to hear the sounds of human laughter which were wafted to them on the windless air. In the silent sunshiny vine-clad country which stretched around those forests, in '*le pays de rire et de ne rien faire*,' from many a steep church-steeple and many a little white chapel on the edge of the great rivers or in the midst of the vast wheat-fields, the vesper-bell was sounding to small townships and tiny hamlets.

It was seven o'clock, and the Court of Love was still open; the chamber of council, or throne-room, being a grassy oval, with grassy seats raised around it, like the seats of an amphitheatre; an open space where the forest joined the gardens, with walls, first of clipped bay, and then of dense oak foliage, around it; the turf had been always kept shorn and

rolled, and the evergreens always clipped, and a marble fountain in the centre of the grass, of fauns playing with naiads, bore an inscription testifying that, in the summer of the year of grace 1530, the Marguerite des Marguerites had held a Court of Love just there, using those same seats of turf, shadowed by those same oak-boughs.

‘Why should we not hold one also? If we have advanced in anything, since the Valois time, it is in the art of intellectual hair-splitting. We ought to be able to argue as many days together as they did. Only, I presume, their advantage was that they meant what they said, and we never or seldom do. They laughed, or they sighed, and were sincere in both; but we do neither, we are *gouailleurs* always, which is not a happy temperament, nor an intellectually productive one.’

So had spoken the mistress of that stately place; and so, her word being law, had it been in the sunset hours before the nine o’clock dinner; and it was a pastime well suited to the luminous evenings of late summer in

The hush of old warm woods that lie
Low in the lap of evening, bright
And bathed in vast tranquillity.

She, herself, was seated on an ivory chair, carved with Hindoo steel, and shaped like a curule chair of old Rome. Two little pages, in costumes of the Valois time, stood behind her, holding large fans of peacock's plumes.

'They are anachronisms,' she had said with a passing frown at the fans, 'but they may remain, though quite certainly the Valois did not know anything of them any more than they knew of blue china and yellow tea.'

But the gorgeous green and gold and purple-eyed plumes looked pretty, so she had let them stay.

'We shall have so many jarring notes of "modernity" in our discussions,' she had said, 'that one note the more in decoration does not matter;' and, backed by them, she sat now upon her ivory throne, an exquisite figure, poetic and delicate, with her cream-white skirts of the same hue as her throne, and her strings of great pearls at her throat. Next her was seated an ecclesiastic of high eminence, who had in vain protested that he was wholly out of place in such a diversion. 'Was Cardinal Bembo out of place at Ferrara and Urbino?' she had objected; and had so suc-

cessfully, in the end, vanquished his scruples, that the late sunbeams, slanting through the oak-leaves and on to that gay assemblage, had found out in it his handsome head and his crimson sash, and his blue eyes full of their keen and witty observation, and his white hands folded together on his knee.

In a semicircle whose wings stretched, right and left were ranged the gentlemen and ladies who formed momentarily the house party of the château; great people all; all the women young and all the men brilliant, no dull person amongst them, dulness being the one vice condemned there without any chance of pardon. They were charming people, distinguished people, handsome people also, and they made a gay and gracious picture, reclining or sitting in any attitudes they chose on these grassy slopes, which had seen the court of Francis and of both Marguerites.

Above their heads floated a silken banner, on which, in letters of gold, were embroidered the wise words, '*Qu'on m'aime, mais avec de l'esprit!*'

'To return to our original demand—what is the definition of Love?' asked their queen

and president, turning her lovely eyes on to the great ecclesiastic, who replied with becoming gravity :

‘Madame, what can a humble priest possibly know of the theme?’

She smiled a little. ‘You know as much as Bembo knew,’ she made answer.

‘Ah no, Madame! The times are changed.’

‘The times, perhaps; not human nature. However, this is the question which must be first decided by the Court at large: How is the nature of Love to be defined?’

A gentleman on her left murmured :

‘No one can tell us so well as you, Madame, who have torn the poor butterfly in pieces so often *sans merci*.’

‘You have broken the first rule of all,’ said the sovereign, with severity. ‘The discussion is to be kept wholly free from all personalities.’

‘A wise rule, or the Court would probably end, like an Italian village *festa*, in a free use of the knife all round.’

‘If you be not quiet you will be exiled for contempt of court, and shut up in the library to write out Ovid’s “*Ars Amatoria*.”’

Once more, I inquire, how are we to define Love?'

'It was never intended to be defined, but to be enjoyed.'

'That is merely begging the question,' said their Queen. 'One enjoys music, flowers, a delicate wine, a fine sunset, a noble sonnet; but all these things are nevertheless capable of analysis and of reduction to known laws. So is Love. I ask once more: How is it to be defined? Does no one seem to know? What curious ignorance!'

'In woman, Love may be defined to be the desire of annexation; and to consist chiefly in a passionate clinging to a sense of personal property in the creature loved.'

'That is cynical, and may be true. But it is not general enough. You must not separate the love of man and the love of woman. We speak of Love general, human, concrete.'

'With all deference I would observe that, if we did not separate the two, we should never arrive at any real definition at all, for Love differs according to sex as much as the physiognomy or the costume.'

'Real Love is devotion!' said a beautiful

blonde with blue eyes that gazed from under black lashes with pathetic tenderness.

‘Euh! euh!’ murmured one impertinent.

‘Oh, oh!’ murmured another.

‘*Ouiche!*’ said a third under his breath.

The sovereign smiled ironically:

‘Ah, my dear Duchesse! all *that* died out with the poets of 1830. It belongs to the time when women wore muslin gowns, looked at the moon, and played the harp.’

‘If I might venture on a definition in the *langue verte*,’ suggested a handsome man, seated at the feet of the queen, ‘though I fear I should be turned out of Court as Rabelais and Scarron are turned out of the drawing-room——’

‘We can imagine what it would be, and will not give you the trouble to say any more. If the definition of Love be, on the contrary, left to me, I shall include it all in one word—*Illusion*.’

‘That is a cruel statement!’

‘It is a fact. We have our own ideal, which we temporarily place in the person, and clothe with the likeness, of whoever is fortunate enough to resemble it superficially enough to

delude us, unconsciously, into doing so. You remember the hackneyed saying of the philosopher about the real John—the John as he thinks himself to be, and the John as others imagine him : it is never the real John that is loved ; always an imaginary one built up out of the fancies of those in love with him.’

‘That is fancy, your Majesty ; it is not love.’

‘And what is love but fancy?—the fancy of attraction, the fancy of selection ; the same sort of fancy as allures the bird to the brightest plumaged mate?’

‘I do not think any love is likely to last which is not based on intellectual sympathy. When the mind is interested and contented, it does not tire half so fast as the eyes or the passions. In any very great love there is at the commencement a delighted sense of meeting something long sought, some supplement of ourselves long desired in vain. When this pleasure is based on the charm of some mind wholly akin to our own, and filled for us with ever-renewing well-springs of the intellect, there is really hardly any reason why this mutual delight should ever change, especially if cir-

cumstances conspire to free it from those more oppressive and irritating forms of contact which the prose of life entails.'

'You mean marriage, only you put it with a great deal of unnecessary euphuism. Tastes differ. Giovanni Dupré's ideal of bliss was to see his wife ironing linen, while his mother-in-law looked on.'

'Dupré was a simple soul, and a true artist, but intellect was not his strong point. If he had chanced to be educated, the good creature with her irons would have become very tiresome to him.'

'What an argument in favour of ignorance!'

'Is it? The savage is content with roots and an earth-baked bird; but it does not follow, therefore, that delicate food does not merit the preference we give to it. I grant, however, that a high culture of taste and intelligence does not result in the adoration of the primitive virtues any more than of the earth-baked bird.'

'Is this a discussion on Love?'

'It is a discussion which grows out of it, like the mistletoe out of the oak. The ideal of Dupré

was that of a simple, uneducated, emotional and unimpassioned creature ; it was what we call essentially a *bourgeois* ideal. It would have been suffocation and starvation, torture and death, to Raffaelle, to Phidias, to Shelley, to Goethe. There are men, born peasants, who soar into angels ; who hate, loathe, and spurn the *bourgeois* ideal from their earliest times of wretchedness ; but there are others who always remain peasants. Millet did, Dupré did, Wordsworth did.'

The queen tinkled her golden handbell and raised her ivory sceptre.

'These digressions are admirable in their way, but I must recall the Court to the subject before them. Someone is bringing in allusions to cookery, flat-irons, and the *bourgeois* ideal which I have always understood was M. Thiers. They are certainly, however interesting, wholly irrelevant to the theme which we are met here to discuss. Let us pass on to the question next upon the list. If no one can define Love except as devotion, that definition suits so few cases that we must accept its existence without definition, and proceed to inquire what are its characteristics and its results.'

‘The first is exigence and the second is *ennui*.’

‘No, the first is sympathy and the second is happiness.’

‘That is very commonplace. Its chief characteristic appears to me to be an extremely rapid transition from a state of imbecile adoration to a state of irritable fatigue. I speak from the masculine point of view.’

‘And I, from the feminine, classify it rather as a transition (regretted but inevitable) from amiable illusions and generous concessions to a wounded sense of offence at ingratitude.’

‘We are coming to the Italian *coltellate*. You both only mean that in love, as in everything else which is human, people who expect too much are disappointed; disappointment is always irritation; it may even become malignity if it take a very severe form.’

‘You seem all of you to have glided into an apology for inconstancy. Is that inevitable to love?’

‘It looks as if it were; or, at all events, its forerunner, fatigue, is so.’

‘You treat love as you would treat a man who asked you to paint his portrait, whilst you

persisted in painting that of his shadow instead. The shadow which dogs his footsteps is not himself.'

'It is cast by himself, so it is a part of him.'

'No, it is an accompanying ghost sent by Nature which he cannot escape or dismiss.'

'My good people,' said their sovereign impatiently, 'you wander too far afield. You are like the group of physicians who let the patient die while they disputed over the Greek root from which the name of his malady was derived. Love, like all other great monarchs, is ill sometimes; but let us consider him in health, not sickness.'

'For Love in a state of health there is no better definition than one given just now—sympathy.'

'The highest kind of love springs from the highest kind of sympathy. Of that there is no doubt. But then that is only to be found in the highest natures. They are not numerous.'

'No; and even they require to possess a great reserve-fund of interest, and a bottomless deposit of inexhaustible comprehension. Such reserve-funds are rare in human nature, which

is usually a mere fretful and foolish chatterbox, *tout en dehors*, and self-absorbed.'

'We are wandering far from the single-minded passion of Ronsard and Petrarca.'

'And we have arrived at no definition. Were I to give one, I should be tempted to say that Love is, in health and perfection, the sense that another life is absolutely necessary to our own, is lovely despite its faults, and even in its follies is delightful and precious to us, we cannot probably say why, and is to us as the earth to the moon, as the moon to the tides, as the lodestone to the steel, as the dew of night to the flower.'

'Very well said, and applicable to both men and women, as descriptive of their emotions at certain periods of their lives. But——'

'For all their lives, until the ice of age glides into their veins.'

'You are poetical enough for Ronsard. Well, let us pass to another question. Does Love die sooner of starvation or of repletion?'

'Of repletion, unquestionably. Of a fit of indigestion he perishes never to rise again. Starved, he will linger on sometimes for a very

long while indeed, and at the first glance of pity
revives in full vigour.'

'Why, then, do women usually commit the
error of surfeiting him? For I agree with you
that a surfeit is fatal.'

'Because most women cannot be brought
to understand that too much of themselves
may bring about a wayward wish to have none
of them. They call this natural and inevit-
able reaction ingratitude and inconstancy, but
it is nothing of the kind; it is only human
nature.'

'Male human nature. The wish for pas-
tures new, characteristic of cattle, sheep and
man.'

"*La femme est si souvent trompée parce
qu'elle prend le désir pour l'amour.*" Someone
wrote that; I forget who did, but it is entirely
true. *Une bouffée de désir*, an hour's caprice,
a swift flaming of mere animal passion which
flares up and dies down like any shooting star,
seems to a woman to be the ideal love of
romance and of tragedy. She dreams of
Othello, of Anthony, of Stradella, and all the
while it is Sir Harry Wildair, or Joseph Sur-
face, or at the best of things Almaviva. She

is ready for the tomb in Verona, but he is only ready for the *chambre meublée*, or at most for the *saison aux eaux*.'

'Is she always ready for the tomb in Verona?' asked a sceptical voice. 'Does she not sometimes, even very often, marry Paris, and "carry on" with Romeo? If I may be allowed to say so, there are a few impassioned and profound temperaments in the world to many light ones; the bread and the sack are, as usual, unevenly apportioned, but these graver and deeper natures are not all necessarily feminine. It is when you have two great and ardent natures involved (and then alone) that you get passion, high devotion, tragedy; but this conjunction is as rare as the passing of Venus across the sun. Usually Romeo throws himself away on some Lady Frivolous, and Juliet breaks her heart for some fop or some fool.'

'That is only because all human life is a game of cross purposes; one only wonders who first set the game going, to amuse the gods or make them weep.'

'That question will scarcely come under the head of amatory analysis. Besides, the

world has been wondering about that ever since the beginning of time, and has never received any answer to its queries.'

'If a quotation be allowed,' suggested the ecclesiastic, 'in lieu of an original opinion, I would beg leave to recall the Prince de Ligne's "*Dans l'amour il n'y a que les commencements qui sont charmants.*" In the middle of the romance I see you all yawn, at the end you usually quarrel. Some wise man—I forget who—has said that it requires much more talent and much more feeling to break off an attachment amiably than to begin it.'

'Because we all feel so amiable at the beginning that it is easy to be so.'

'Admit also that there are very few characters which will stand the test of intimacy; very few minds of sufficient charm and originality to be able to bear the strain of long and familiar intercourse.'

'What has the mind to do with it?'

'That question is flippant and even coarse. The mind has something to do with it, even in animals; or why should the lion prefer one lioness to another? When d'Aubiac went to the gallows kissing a tiny velvet muff of Margaret de

Valois, or when young Calixte de Montmorin knelt on the scaffold pressing to his lips a little bow of blue ribbon which had belonged to Madame de Vintimille, the muff and the ribbon represented a love with which certainly the soul had far more to do than the senses.'

'It was a sentiment.'

'A sentiment if you will, but strong enough to overcome all fear of death or personal regret. The muff, the ribbon, were symbols of an imperishable and spiritual devotion; these trifles, like Psyche's butterfly, were representative of an immortal element in mortal life and mortal feeling.'

'M. de Béthune would go to the scaffold like that himself,' said the sovereign lady with a smile of approval and of indulgent derision.

'And our lady,' hinted the Duc de Béthune, 'forgets her own rule, that all personalities are forbidden.'

'It is of no use to have the power to make laws if one have not also the power to transgress them. Well, if immortality is to enter into love, let wit also enter there. One is not beheaded every day, but every day one is liable to be bored. *J'aime qu'on m'aime, mais avec de*

l'esprit. Every intellectual person must exact that. To worship my ribbon is nothing if you also fatigue my patience and my ear. The majority of people divorce love and wit. They are very wrong. It is only wit which can tell Love when he has gone too far, or is losing ground, has repeated himself *ad nauseam*, or requires absence to restore his charm.'

'*Ah, Majesté!* by the time he has become such a philosopher has he not ceased to be Love at all?'

'Oh no. That motto was chosen as the legend of this Court expressly for the truth which it contains. Why does most love end so drearily in a sudden death by quarrelling or in a lingering death by tedium? Because it has had no wit, no judgment, no reserve, no skill. By way of showing itself to be eternal, it has hammered itself into pieces on the rock of repetition. *Qu'on m'aime, mais avec de l'esprit!* What a world of endured *ennui* sighs forth in that appeal!'

'No woman upon earth has had so much love given her as the châtelaine of Amyôt, and no woman on earth ever viewed love with such unkind and airy contempt.'

She smiled. She neither denied nor affirmed the accusation.

‘She has a crystal throne of her own from which she looks down on the weaknesses of mortals and cannot be touched by them,’ said the Duc de Béthune.

She replied again, ‘*Qu’on m’aime, mais avec de l’esprit!*’

‘It is the motto of one who sets much greater store upon amusement than upon affection. Who can say, moreover, what may have the good fortune to be considered “*esprit*” by her? I fear she finds us all very dull to-day.’

‘Dull, no. Sentimental perhaps.’

‘Your heaviest word of censure!’

‘To return to our theme : do you not punish inconstancy?’

‘Certainly not. In the first place, inconstancy is a wholly involuntary, and therefore innocent, inclination. In the second, if any one be so stupid that he or she cannot keep the affections they have once won, they deserve to lose them, and can claim no pity.’

‘Surely they may be the victims of a sad and unmerited fate?’

‘Unmerited—no. They have not known

how to keep what they had got. Probably they have worried it till it escaped in desperation, as a child teases a bird in a cage till the bird pushes itself through the bars, preferring the chance of losing itself on the road to the certainty of being strangled in prison.'

'Who would not prefer it?'

'The difficulty in most cases is that, in all loves, the scales of proportion are weighted unevenly: there is generally one lighter than the other. Say it is a poor nature and a great nature; say it is a strong passion and a passing caprice; say it is a profound temperament and a shallow one; in some way or other the scales are almost always imperfectly adjusted. When they are quite even—which happens once out of a million times—then there is a great and felicitous love; an exquisite and imperishable sympathy.'

'But who holds these magical scales? It is the holder who is responsible.'

'The holder is Fate.'

'Chance.'

'Opportunity.'

'Destiny.'

'Predestination.'

‘Circumstance.’

‘Affinity.’

‘Affinity can only hold them on that millionth occasion when a perfect love is the result.’

‘Usually Chance and Circumstance fill the scales, and they are two roguish boys who like to make mischief. Affinity is the angel; perhaps the only angel by which poor humanity is ever led into an earthly paradise.’

‘That is worthy of Philip Sydney.’

‘Or of the Earl of Lytton.’

‘And is so charming that we will not risk having anything coarse or commonplace said after it. Let us adjourn the debate till to-morrow.’

‘Nay, *Majesté*; let us pass to another question: What is the greatest dilemma of Love?’

‘To have to galvanise itself into an imitation of life when it is dead.’

‘Is it worse to be the last to love, or the first to grow tired?’

‘In the former case one’s self-esteem is hurt; in the latter one’s conscience.’

‘The wounds of conscience are sooner cured than those of vanity.’

‘Whoever loves most loves longest.’

‘No, whoever is least loved loves longest.’

‘How is that to be explained?’

‘The contradictions of human nature will usually suffice to explain everything.’

‘But there may be another explanation also; the one who is least loved is the least cloyed, and the most apprehensive of alteration.’

‘Love is best worked with egotism, as gold is worked with alloy.’

‘Surely the essential loveliness of love is self-sacrifice?’

‘That is a theory. In fact, the only satisfactory love is one which gives and receives mutual pleasure. When there is self-sacrifice on one side the pleasure also is one-sided.’

‘Then the revellers of the Decamerone knew more of love than Dante?’

‘That is approaching a theme too full of dangers to be discussed—the difference between physical and spiritual love. I do not consider that you have satisfactorily answered the previous question: What is the greatest dilemma of Love?’

‘When, in the open doorway of its house

of life, one passion, grown old and grey, passes out limping, and meets another passion newly come thither, and laughing, with the blossoms of April in its sunny hair.'

'What a sonnet in a sentence! What is Love to do in such a case? Shall he detain the grey-haired crippled guest?'

'He cannot. For the more he shall endeavour to retain him the thinner and paler and more impalpable will the withered and lame passion grow.'

'And the newly-come one?'

'Oh, he will enter, smiling and strong, and will fill the house with the music of his pipe and the odour of his hyacinths for awhile, until he too shall in turn pass outwards, when his music is silent and his flowers are dead.'

'Is Love then always to be mourned like Lycidas?'

'He is in no sense like Lycidas; Lycidas died, a perfect youth. Love, with time, grows pale and wan and feeble, and a very shadow of itself, before it dies.'

'There are some who say, if he have not immortality he is not Love at all; but only

Caprice, Vanity, Wantonness, or faithless Fancy, masquerading in his dress.'

'How can that be immortal which has no existence without mortal forms?'

'Here is one of the notes of modernity! The sad note of self-consciousness; the consciousness of mortality and of insignificance; the *memento mori* which is always with us. And yet we do not respect death, we only hate it and fear it; because it will make of us a dreary, ugly, putrid thing. That is all we know. And the knowledge dulls even our diversions. We can be *gouaillieur*, but we cannot be gay if we would.'

'There is too great a tendency here to use *gros mots*—devotion, death, immortality, &c. They are a mistake in a disquisition which wishes to be witty. They are like the use of cannon in an opera. But I think, even in France, the secret of lightness of wit is lost. We have all read too much German philosophy.'

'We will endeavour to be gayer to-morrow. We will wake all the shades of Brantôme.'

'Well,' their sovereign declared, as she rose, 'we have held our Court to little avail;

some pretty things have been said, and some stupid ones, but we have arrived at no definite conclusion, unless it be this: that love is only respectable when it is unhappy, and ceases to exist the moment it is contented.'

'A cruel sentence, Madame!'

'Human nature is cruel; so is Time.'

When the sun had wholly set, and only a warm yellow glow through all the west told that its glory had passed, the Court broke up for that day, and strolled in picturesque groups towards the house as the chimes of the clock tower told the hour of dinner.

'How very characteristic of our time and of our world,' said the queen, as she drew her ivory-hued, violet-laden skirts over the smooth turf. 'We have talked for three whole hours of Love, and nobody has ever thought of mentioning Marriage as his kinsman!'

'He who has had the honour to marry you might well have done so, had he been here to-day,' murmured a courtier on her right.

She laughed, looking up into the deep-blue evening sky through the network of green leaves:

‘But he was not here, so he was saved the difficulty of choice between an insincerity and a rudeness, always a very serious dilemma to him. Marriage is the grave of Love, my dear friend, even if he be buried with roses for his pillow and lilies for his shroud.’

‘But Love may be stronger than Death. Solomon has said so.’

‘What is stronger than Death? Death is stronger than all of us. *Tout cela pourrira.* It is the despair of the lover and the poet, and the consolation of the beggar when the rich and the beautiful go past him.’

She spoke with a certain melancholy, and absently struck the tall heads of seeding grasses with her ivory sceptre.

‘We have only wearied you, I fear,’ said her companion, with contrition and mortification.

‘That is the fault of Love,’ she answered, with a smile.

As they left the shadow of the trees, crossing the grassland was a herd of cows and calves already passing away in the distance, going to their byres; far behind them,

lingering willingly, were the herdsman and his love; he a comely lad in a blue blouse and a peaked cap, she a smiling buxom maiden with dusky tresses under a linen coif, and cheeks glowing like a 'Catherine pear, the side that's next the sun.'

'Lubin and Lisette,' said Béthune with a smile, 'practically illustrating what we have been spoiling with the too fine wire-drawing of analysis. I am sure that they come much nearer than we to the story-tellers of the Hép-tameron.'

The châtelaine of Amyôt looked at the two rustic lovers with a little wistfulness and a good-natured contempt.

They had passed out of the shade of the woods, and the rose-glow of evening illumined their interlaced figures as they followed their cows.

"To know is much, yet to enjoy is more," she quoted. 'I suppose that is what you mean. Yet I rather incline to think that love as a sentiment is the product of education. The cows know almost as much of it as your Lubin and Lisette.'

'Brandès says,' observed one of her party,

‘that love as a sentiment was always unknown in a state of nature, and was only created with the first petticoat. Petticoats have invariably been responsible for a great deal. They ruined France, according to the Great Frederic ; but if they have raised us from the level of the cattle they have redeemed their repute.’

‘Poor cattle ! They have as much poetry in their eyes as there is in the “Penseroso.” Lubin and Lisette are *Naturkinder* ; but when both a cow and Lisette become the property of Lubin, he will assign the higher place to the first, both in life and in death.’

‘Well, he shall have both of them, for having met us at so apropos an instant,’ she answered with a little smile. ‘Perhaps the only word of truth that has been said in the whole discussion was the quotation : “*Il n’y a que les commencements qui sont charmants !*” ’

The great woodland which they traversed as she spoke opened into an avenue of beeches, long and straight, the branches meeting and interlacing overhead until the opening at the farther end looked like an arched doorway closing a cathedral aisle. The archway was filled with dim golden suffused light, and within that

archway of twilight and golden haze there rose the snowy column of a high-reaching fountain ; it was the first of the *grandes eaux* of the garden of Amyôt. And the sovereign of the Court of Love was she who had once been the Princess Napraxine.

CHAPTER II.

As they entered on the smoother sward of the stately gardens a figure came out of the deep shadow of clipped walls of bay and approached them.

‘Is the Court over? At what decision has it arrived?’ said the master of Amyôt as he saluted the party and kissed the hand of his wife with a graceful formality of greeting.

‘It will have to sit for half a century if it be compelled to come to any,’ returned the châtelaine. ‘We have said many pretty things about love, Béthune in especial; but we met Lubin with Lisette loitering behind their cows, and I fear the living commentary was truer to nature than all our doctrines.’

‘The only issue of its resolutions is that you are to give away a cow and a maiden to the admirable lover,’ said M. de Béthune. ‘He

crossed our path just in time to point a moral for us: we were all sadly in want of one.'

'Could you not agree then? Surely you chose a very simple subject.'

'It might be simple in the days of Philemon and Baucis. It is sufficiently complicated now. Is the sentiment which sent d'Aubiac to the scaffold, pressing a little blue velvet muff to his lips, the same thing as the unpoetic impulse which makes the *femelle de l'homme* sought by Tom, Dick, and Harry? You will admit that a vast field of the most various emotions separates the two kinds of passion?'

'Certainly: there is a great difference between Montrose's Farewell and Sir John Suckling's verses.'

'Precisely: so we came to no decision. We have all too much of the terrible modern tendency to hesitation and melancholy. I do not know why; unless it come from the conviction of all of us that love is always melancholy when it is not absurd.'

'What a cruel sentiment!'

'A perfectly true assertion. The only loves respectable in tradition are those which have ended wretchedly. Suppose Romeo had

been happy ; or Stradella ; what do you think the poets could have made of them ? Love must end somehow : if it end in tragedy its dignity is saved like Cæsar's.'

'But why need it end ? You, at least, have seen that through all disappointments it can endure,' murmured he who had cited the love of d'Aubiac for Marguerite.

She looked at him and shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly.

'Love is, so unhappily, like a comet. It mounts to its perihelion, increasing in splendour as it goes, and then slowly, little by little, the glory departs, the sovereign of the skies grows less and less, until at last there is no more sign of it anywhere, and all is darkness. But the comet is not really gone ; it has only gone—elsewhere.'

Her slight delicate laugh robbed the speech of the melancholy which it would otherwise have possessed.

'My wife believes in no constancy,' said Othmar.

She looked at him with her mysterious smile ?

'I believe in Romeo's, I believe in Stradella's, because the kindness of death saved

them from the ridicule of forswearing themselves. What a pity you did not come home a little sooner. You would have been an invaluable ally to the sentimentalists headed by Béthune. He was eloquent, but his cause was weak.'

'My cause was strong,' said the Duc de Béthune; 'it was my tongue which lacked persuasiveness.'

'No, you were very poetical; you were only not convincing. My dear friend, we are too scientific in these days for sentiment to have any abiding place in us; we are pessimists, it is true, but we mourn for ourselves, not for others. We are neither gay enough nor sad enough to do justice to such discussions as this which we have tried to revive; we are only bored. We do not take our fooling joyously or our sorrows deeply. We are uneasily conscious that we are childish and unreal in both. Then there is the incurable modern tendency to end everything with a laugh *en gouailleur*, yet with tears in our eyes. We are always ridiculing ourselves, yet we are always vexed that, ridiculous as we are, we must still die.'

‘At the present moment we must still eat,’ said Othmar, as the boom of a silver-toned gong came over the gardens in deep waves of sound.

It was nine o’clock, and that repast which had been used to be called in the Valois *Amyôt arrière-grand-souper*, and was now called ‘dinner,’ awaited them.

There were some twenty-five guests then staying there; she did not approve of immense house parties, and she restricted her house list to the very choicest of her favourites and associates; she always asked double the number of men to that of women, but she was proportionately careful that the latter should be those whom men most liked and admired; she was wholly above the petty envies and jealousies of her sex. Her vanity rather consisted in having it said that she feared no rivals.

As the deep boom of the gong sounded from the house, she and her guests passed onward, and in their Valois dresses were soon seated in the summer banqueting-room: a modern addition to the château, an open loggia in the Italian style, with marble floor and marble columns, one side open to the air, the

other sides rich in white marble bas-reliefs by French sculptors ; the ceiling had been painted by Puvis de Chavannes with the story of Europa. In each corner there were tall palms in large square cases of white porcelain ; the white columns were garlanded by passion-flowers, which grew without ; at either end there was a fountain, their basins filled with gold fish and water-lilies ; through the columns the whole enchanting view of the west gardens was seen stretching far away to where the Loire waters spread wide as a lake and mirroring the newly-risen moon.

‘I had it built,’ she said, in answer to some one who complimented her upon it. ‘There is a great dining-hall and a small dining-room indoors, but neither are fitted for summer evenings. It is a barbarism to be shut up within four walls just as the moon rises and the nightingales sing. The matter of food is always a distressingly coarse question ; nothing can really spiritualise or redeem it, but at least it may be divested of some of its brute aspects. A delicate cuisine does that for us in some measure, and the scene we have around us may do more. The London and Paris habit

of sitting in mere boxes, more or less well decorated, is horrible. Perfect ease, vast space, and soft shadowy distances are absolutely necessary to preserve illusions as we dine.'

And to that end she had caused to be built the loggia of Amyôt, with as much celerity and breathless obedience to her commands as the architects of the East showed a sultan of Bagdad or Benares when he bade a palace of marble uprise from the sand. Her fine taste would not have allowed her to hurt the architecture of Amyôt with any incongruity, however much her caprices might have desired it; but the marble loggia accorded in exterior with the Renaissance outline of the château, and the tone of Primaticcio and the epoch of Jean Goujon had been faithfully followed in its internal decoration.

'What a perfect place it is!' said one of her guests to her after dinner.

She smiled.

'In August, yes. When the terraces are hung with ice, and the forests black with winter storm, it is not so perfect. All places have their season, like all lives.'

‘There are some places, like some lives, which can never lose their beauty.’

‘Do you think so? I have never found them. When one knows every leaf, every stone, every fence, the beauty of the place fades for us as it does when one knows every impulse, every prejudice, every fault, and every virtue of the life.’

‘A melancholy truth—if it be a truth. Perhaps it is only half a one. There are people who love their homes.’

‘There are prisoners who have loved their cells! Amyôt is delightful in many ways, but I have no more sense of home in it than a swallow has in the eaves it builds under for one summer. You must go to the vine-dresser’s wife in the cliff cabin on the river for *that*.’

‘Then the vine-dresser’s wife has a jewel which the great châtelaine’s crown is without?’

‘A jewel? Are you sure it is a jewel? I think there is much to be said in favour of the restlessness of our world, it saves us from rust and reflection; it makes us unprejudiced and cosmopolitan; it annihilates nationalities and antipathies. I imagine, if Horace had lived

now, he would never have been still; he would have seen the farm in its pleasantest season, and that only. He would have carried with him the undying lamp of his enchanting temperament, and he would have been happy anywhere.'

'But is it really incomprehensible to you, the love of home?'

'I think so. I have lived in too many places. We are a few months here, a few months in Paris, a few weeks in the Riviera, a few weeks in Russia, or Vienna, or London. It is impossible to carry about the sense of home peripatetically with you as the snail carries his shell. The sparrow feels it, the swallow does not. I have always had a number of houses in which I spend a number of months, of weeks, of days. I like each of them to be perfect in its own way, and I like each to have copies of my favourite books in it: the sight of Goethe, of Molière, of Horace makes one feel *chez soi*. That is as near "home" as I approach. I imagine all happiness is much more a matter of temperament than of place or of circumstance.'

'I do not believe you are happy even now!'

It was a personal speech, and too bold a one

to be justified even by intimate and privileged friendship. But she was moved to it by that ever ready and pitiless self-analysis which made her as severe a critic of herself as of others.

‘Happy? Oh, I must be,’ she said with a smile. ‘Who on earth should be happy if I am not? I have all the vulgar attributes of happiness in profusion and all the more delicate ones too. If I am not so, it can only be because my temperament is the very opposite of a *porte-bonheur* like Horace’s. I have always expected too much of everything and of everybody, and yet I am not at all what you would call an imaginative person. I ought to be prosaically contented with the world as it is. But I am not.’

It was a sultry and lovely August night. The sky was radiant and the white lustre of the full moon shone over all the scene, making the gardens, the terraces, the fountains, the parterres of flowers light as day, and leaving the masses of the great forest which surrounded them in deepest shadow. It was haunted ground, this stately and royal place where both Marguerites had passed in turn summers dead three centuries ago; where the one, witty, wise and faithful, had

read the tales of her Heptameron beneath its spreading oaks ; and the other, lovely, perilous and faithless, had gathered its roses and ruffled them, murmuring the ‘ *un peu—beaucoup—passionné-ment*,’ as one passion hotly chased another from her fickle breast, each scarce living the life of the gathered rose.

The present châtelaine of Amyôt, leaning against one of the marble columns of her summer dining-hall, and listening to the words of a friend who dared tell her truths, looked out into the wide white moonlight, on to the trellised rose walks, the turf smooth as velvet, bordered with ground ivy ; the marble statues standing against the high walls of close-clipped evergreens ; the deep and sombre forests which held the heart of so many secrets, the story of so many lives and of so many deaths, safe shut away for ever, dumb and dead in the eternal mystery of its vernal solitudes. If she were not happy who should be ?

But happiness—what an immense word !—or what a little one ! A poet’s dream of paradise, or the peasant’s contentment in the chimney-corner and the pot of soup ! Which you will—but never both at once.

She was as happy as a very analytical and fastidious nature can possibly be, but at times her old enemy dissatisfaction looked in over the flowers and through the golden air. She was pursued by her old consciousness that the human race was after all exceedingly limited in its capabilities, and the lives of men on the whole very wearisome. There was with her that vague disappointment and dissatisfaction which come to most of us when we have done what we wished to do. There is a monotony even in what is most agreeable, which makes all happiness dull after awhile. Priests tell us that this unpleasant weariness is intended to detach us from the joys of earth, and philosophers are content to find its solution in the physiology of the senses. But whether explained sentimentally or scientifically, the result is the same: that expectation makes up so large a component part of pleasure that, when there is nothing new to expect, pleasure becomes so attenuated as to be scarcely visible.

All loves which have been constant and become famous have been those to which immense difficulties arose, where perils supplied the element of an unending interest. It is

when they can only behold each other in the stolen hours of the moonlight, that Romeo and Giulietta are to each other divinely fair. Were they condemned to face each other at dinner every night for ten years, what divinity would be left for either in the eyes of the other?

Habit and love cannot dwell together. As well ask the rose to flower beneath a slab of stone.

‘Happiness is not of this world,’ she said, with a little dreamy lingering smile. ‘Is not that what your brethren are always telling us?’

Melville answered with a sigh :

‘May this not prove that we may at least hope for it in some other?’

‘Yes, I think,’ she replied, rather to herself than to him, ‘I think with you ; the strongest argument (if any are strong) in favour of the future development of the soul, is the absolute impossibility for anybody with any average mind to be content with what he or she finds in human existence. Life is a pretty enough picture for people like ourselves ; it is sometimes a pageant, it is sometimes even

a poem, but it is all wonderfully unproductive and circumscribed. Except in a few hours of passion or exultation, we are sensible of the flatness and insufficiency of it all. We have ideals which may be only remembrance, but if not must surely be prevision; ideals which, at any rate, are larger and of another atmosphere than anything which belongs to earth.'

Her voice grew soft and dreamy, and had a tone in it of wistful regret. It was not the mere dissatisfaction of the *ennuyée* which moved her. She had had her own way in life, and the success of it had become monotonous.

'Yes,' she repeated with a little laugh, which was not very gay; 'I suppose it must be the soul in us; that odd, unquiet, dissatisfied, nameless thing inside us, which is always crying, "Give, give, give!" and never gets what it wants. Our discontent must be the proof of something in us meant for better things, just as the eternal revolutions of Paris are the proof of its people's genius. What a night it is! It wants Lorenzo and Jessica, but they are not here. There are flirtations and intrigues enough indoors, but Lorenzo and Jessica are not of our

world. It is a pity. The moon seems to look for them.'

Then she left the marble loggia and went amongst her guests, who were gathering together in the silver drawing-room, as the sounds of music, in the ever-youthful 'Invitation à la Valse,' called them, with midnight, to the ball-room. Gervase Melville strayed away by himself through the moonlit aisles of roses.

'Always the pebble of *ennui* in the golden slipper of pleasure,' he thought. 'Perhaps life is, after all, more evenly balanced than the wooden shoe and the ragged stocking will ever believe. Perhaps in life, as they said to-day that it is in love, hunger is a happier state than satiety. Perhaps, if Lorenzo had never married Jessica, he would have written sonnets to her all his life, as Petrarca wrote them to Laura! The Lady of Amyôt is the most interesting woman I have ever known, but she is the one person on earth capable of making me doubt the faith that I have lived and hope to die for; when I am amongst the green savages of Formosa or the drunken Indians of Ottawa, I can still believe in the human soul; but when I am with her I doubt—I doubt—I doubt!

She is as exquisitely organised as this gloxinia which is full of dew and of moonbeams ; but she believes that she will have only her one brief passage on earth like the gloxinia—the glory of a day—and alas ! who shall prove that she is wrong ? When she holds my creed in the hollow of her white hand and smiles, it grows small and shrunken as a daisy that is dead ! ’

CHAPTER III.

‘BULWER has said that none preserve imagination after forty; does anyone preserve illusions after thirty?’ said a very pretty woman on her thirty-second birthday.

Her husband chivalrously replied, ‘Anyone who lives beside you will preserve them until he is a hundred.’

She looked at him dubiously, curiously, with a slight smile which was a little cynical and a little pensive.

‘I was never famous for the culture of them,’ she said, a little regretfully. ‘I do not know why you should have found me so favourable to yours—if you have found me favourable,’ she added, after a pause.

As the most eloquent and comprehensive answer he could give, he kissed her hands.

She glanced at her face in the mirror; she was certainly thirty-two years old on this last

day of February. She did not like it; no woman likes it. The way is not actually longer because the traveller reads on a milestone the cipher which tells him how many thousands of yards he has traversed and has still to traverse, but the milestone suddenly and distastefully testifies to distance, and increases the sense of fatigue which the road has given.

‘If women had all a happy Euthanasia,’ she said dreamily, ‘when they reach the age I am now, what a good thing it would be for the world. On her thirtieth birthday every woman ought to be put to death; mercifully, poetically, as the girl dies in the “Faute de l’Abbé Mouret,” stifled in flowers, but securely put to death.’

‘The world,’ said Othmar, smiling, ‘would certainly be rid of its most perilous enchantresses if your proposal became law.’

‘And how much prettier our drawing-rooms would look, and how much effort and heartburning would be spared, if every woman died before she began to “make up”! Do you know last night, in the mirror figure of the cotillion, as the men looked over my shoulder one by one, I forgot all about them. I only

looked at my own face ; it seemed to me that there was a sort of dimness in it, as there is on a photograph which has been some years done ; not age exactly, but the shadow of age which was coming up behind me as the men were coming, and was looking over my shoulder as they looked. Why do you laugh ? It was not agreeable to me. I was startled when the voice of Hugo de Rochefort came behind my ear, " Ah, Madame, is it possible ? Do you reject us all ? " I had quite forgotten where I was, and why they were all waiting. Perhaps Age only meant to say to me, " Do not stay for the cotillions any more ! " '

' If Age did, it certainly found no man living to agree with it,' said her companion. ' If you will allow me to say so, I do not recognise you in this unusual phase of self-depreciation. What bee has stung you to-day ? '

' Self-knowledge, I suppose. Whatever philosophers may declare to the contrary, it is a very uncomfortable companion.'

' Surely that depends on one's mood ? '

' Everything in life depends on one's mood. When I am in another mood I shall say to my-

self that I have ten years left in which I shall be agreeable to myself and other people ; that the young girls do not understand men and do not influence them ; that a woman is always young so long as she retains her power to please and to be pleased. There are five hundred sophisms with which I can console myself, but just now I am not in a humour to be consoled by them. I am only sensible of what is very frightful to think of—that a woman is allotted threescore and ten years as well as a man, but that he may enjoy himself to the end of them, if only he keep his health ; she comes to the close of her pleasures before her life is half lived. With her, the preface is exquisite, the poem is delightful, but the colophon is of such preposterous and odious length and dulness, that it is out of all proportion to the brevity of the romance.'

He smiled. 'I know that it is always hopeless to convince you when you are in a pessimistic humour.'

'Oh yes ; into one's character, as into the characters of others, one gets little flashes of real light here and there, now and then ; the moments are not agreeable ; they are the

flashes of a policeman's lantern; while they are shining disguise is not possible.'

'What do you see when they flash upon me?'

'Not very much that I would have changed except your sentimentalities.'

'I am grateful.'

She looked at him curiously. 'Did you doubt it?'

He answered, 'Well, no; not precisely. But with such a character as yours one never knows.'

'Is not that the charm of my character?'

'I think it is the secret of your ascendancy. No one can be wholly, absolutely sure of what you are thinking far down in the recesses of your immense thoughts.'

'That was what people used to say of Louis Napoleon, and there never was a shallower creature. I think I have more profundity than he; but I have not so much as I had. Happiness is not intellectual; it tends to make one content, and content is stupidity; that is why Age looked into the cotillion mirror to-night to remind me that I was getting stupid. No, you are not to pay me any compliments,

my dear ; after ten years of them they have a certain *fadeur*, though I am sure you are sincere when you make them.'

She smiled and rose.

This was her thirty-second birthday. That unpleasant and unpoetic fact shadowed life to her for the moment. She was still young enough, and had potent charm enough, of which she was fully conscious, to own it frankly. The world was still at her feet. She could afford to confess that she foresaw the time when it would not be so. True, in a way she would have a certain empire always. She would never altogether lose her power over the minds of men when she should lose it over their passions. But it would be a pale-grey kingdom, a sad shore, with sea-lavender blowing above silvery sand instead of her own Ogygia, with its world of roses and its smiling suns.

Face it with what courage and charm she may, the thought of age must always appal a woman. It takes so much ; it offers nothing. True, some of the greatest passions the world has seen have been born after youth had long passed, and have burned on till death with

deeper fires of sunset than ever dawn has seen. But a woman is not consoled by that possibility as morning slides past her and the shadows grow long.

Othmar, without other reply, opened the door of her dressing-room, and there entered two small children, a boy and a girl, with faces like flowers, and sweet rosy mouths, carrying a large gilded basket between them, filled with white lilac and gardenia. They came up to her hand in hand, not very certain upon their feet or in their speech, and bowed their little golden heads with pretty reverence, and stammered together with birdlike voices, '*Bonne fête, maman.*'

'Here are your eternal courtiers,' said their father. 'Time will make no difference in their worship of you.'

She smiled again, and took them together on her lap, and kissed them with tenderness, her hand playing with their soft, light curls.

But she said perversely, and a little sadly: 'My dear, how can one tell? That is only a phrase also. One never knows what children may become. In fifteen or twenty years' time Otho may send me a *sommaton respectueuse*,

because he wants to marry a circus-rider, and Xenia may hate me because I make her accept a grand-duke whilst she is in love with an attaché. One never can tell. They are fond of me now, certainly.'

'They will as certainly love you always.'

'What an optimist you have grown! It is flattering to me,' she answered, as she caressed the children and gave them some crystals of sugar. 'I cannot help seeing things as they are; you know I never could help it; and the relations of parents with their children, which are pretty and idyllic to begin with, are often apt to alter to very grim prose as time goes on, and separate interests arise to part them. Why does no sovereign who ever lived like his or her immediate heir? Why is the crown prince always arrayed against the crown?'

'I am very fond of my crown prince,' said Othmar, as he drew his young son to him.

'He is not a crown prince yet; he is a baby. Wait until he does want to marry that circus-rider, or until you see him take an opposite side in European politics to yourself. It is when the distinct Ego asserts itself in your child, in opposition to your own entity,

that the separation begins and the antagonism rises.'

'You will always analyse so mercilessly!'

'I can never be content with the world's commonplaces and sophisms, if you mean that. And on this day, when I am thirty-two years old, no persuasion on earth would convince me that, when the time should come which will make me twice that age, I shall be anything but an unhappy woman. It will not console me in the least that my grandchildren may wish me *bonne fête*.'

'I wonder if you are serious?'

'I was never more so, I assure you. Life is a series of losses; but a woman's losses outweigh a man's by a million. From the first little line she sees between her eyebrows or about her mouth, existence is nothing but a *dégringolade* for her. To say that she is compensated for the loss of her empire by becoming a grandmother is wholly absurd.'

'You always allot such a small space to the affections!'

'Madame de Sévigné allotted the largest that any clever woman ever did or could. Do you think the chill philosophies of Madame de

Grignan rewarded her? Myself, *je n'ai pas cette bosse là*. You know it very well. I am fond of these children, because they are yours; but I do not think them in the least a compensation for growing old!

'As if years mattered to a woman of your wit!'

She smiled.

'That is so like a man's clumsy idea of consolation. True, wit, in theory, is very much admired, but, practically, nobody cares much about it, unless it comes out of a handsome mouth. Men prefer white shoulders. And——'

'And your shoulders?' said Othmar, with a smile. 'Are they not of snow, and fit for Venus' self?'

'Oh, they are white as yet,' she cried indifferently.

'For myself,' he added, 'I shall be delighted when the faces of no aspirants are reflected in your cotillion mirror. I detest all those men——'

'Oh no, you do not,' she said tranquilly. 'If there were none of them you would say to yourself, "Really, she is very much aged." A man's love is always so made up of pride and

prejudice that if no one envy him what he has he soon ceases to value it. On the whole, men go much more by the opinion of the world than women do. A woman, if she take a fancy to a cripple, or a hunchback, or a *crétin*, makes herself ridiculous over him, without any regard to how she may be laughed at; but a man is always thinking of what they say at the clubs. In his most headlong follies he is always nervous about the opinion of the *galerie*.'

'You always think us such fools,' said Othmar, with some ill humour.

'Oh no,' she said again with a smile, 'only I think you are, in a way, more conscientious than we are, and in another way more nervous. A woman, when she has a fancy for a thing, would burn down half the world to get at it; a man would hesitate to sacrifice so many cities and people, and would also be preoccupied with the idea that he would be badly placed in history for his exploit.'

'Then he is no true lover.'

'Are there any true lovers?'

'I think you should be the last woman who could doubt it.'

'You want a compliment, but I shall not

give it you. Or if you mean the others—well, perhaps they have been, or they are, true enough; but then that is only because a passion for me has always been thought *d'un chic incroyable*. I should believe in the love of a man if I were a milkmaid, but when to be in love with one is a mere fashion like the height of your wheels or the shape of your mail, one may question its single-mindedness. I have never, either, observed that the most devoted of them eat their dinner less regularly, or smoke less often when they were unhappy. Even you yourself, when you were wasting with despair, did not refuse to dine or smoke.'

'Do not speak of that time,' said Othmar, with a look of distress. 'As for your complaint against us, we are mere machines in a great deal; the machine goes on mechanically in its daily exercise for its daily necessities; that movement of mechanism has nothing to do with the suffering of the soul. Nothing can be more unjust than to confuse the one with the other. You say a man cannot be a poet or a lover because he eats a truffled beefsteak. I say it is the mechanical part of him which eats the beefsteak, and eating it impairs neither

his sensitive nerves nor his passions. As for smoking, it is a consolation because it is a sedative.'

'Admirably reasoned,' said Nadine, 'but you do not convince me. I am certain that the conventionalities and habits of modern life do diminish the forces of passion. When Tityæus was forsaken by Musidora, and had only the primæval woods, the *fons sylvæ*, the mountain solitudes, and the silent sheep, his grief could reign over him undivided; but now-a-days, when he dines out every evening, is made to laugh whether he will or no, finds a hundred engagements waiting for every hour, and has the babble of the world eternally in his ear, his remembrance is of a very attenuated sort. I do not say that he suffers nothing, but I do say that he often forgets that he suffers.'

'I am not at all sure of that,' said Othmar, 'and what is more, I am almost disposed to think that the effort to affect indifference which Society compels, is much more suffering than the delightful permission which Nature gave your shepherd to be as miserable as he pleased, unchecked and unremarked. The world may cause the most excruciating torture

to a man who is compelled to be in it and of it, while some great preoccupation makes every thought except one alien and hateful.'

'If the man have a great nature, perhaps. But how many have?'

'As many, or as few, as in the days of the shepherds. The ordinary Tityæus, I imagine, did not weep long for the ordinary Musidora, but soon tuned his pipe afresh and put new ribbons on his crook.'

'I do not quite think that; I think all feelings were stronger, warmer, deeper, more concentrated in the earlier ages of the world. Nowadays we contrive to make everything absurd—our heroes, our poets, our sorrows, our loves, all are dwarfed by our treatment of them. Even death itself we have managed to make ridiculous, and strip of all its majesty. Ulysses' self would have looked grotesque if buried with the civil rites which attended Gambetta to his tomb, or the religious rites which mocked the prince of mockers, Disraeli. Whenever I die I hope you will let me be carried by young children clad in white to some green grave in your own woods, where only a stag will come or a pretty hare. Will

you be unconventional enough for that? Or will you be afraid of the French municipalities and the Russian popes? I should have courage to execute your last wishes so, but whether you will have the courage to execute mine—— Men are so much more timid than women!’

‘Do not talk of death!’ said Othmar, with a passing shudder.

‘Did I not say that men are cowards?’

‘Not for ourselves; for those we love we are.’

She smiled a little contemptuously, a little sadly.

‘Ah, my dear! who knows? Death would not be so dreadful to me as if I lived to incur Horace’s reproach to Lyce. What is it? “*Fis anus, et tamen,*” &c., &c., though that reproach perhaps belongs to a more unsophisticated age than our own. Nowadays the *perruquiers* let nobody get grey, and there are a great many grandmothers, even great-grandmothers, who are entirely charming—more charming than the girls who are just out.’

‘I do not think you will ever go to the *perruquiers*, but you will always be charming, and you will never be old.’

‘ One would think you were my lover ! ’

‘ Why will you never believe that I am still so ? ’

‘ Because I do not believe in any miracles ; I go to no Loretto. Love is a volatile precipitate, and marriage a solvent in which it disappears. If we are exceptions to that rule of chemistry and life, we are so extraordinarily exceptional that fate must have some dreadful punishment in store for us.’

‘ Or some exceptional reward.’

‘ Is not virtue always punished ? ’ she said, with her enigmatical smile. ‘ You are a very handsome man, and have been the most poetic of lovers. But in the nature of things I grow used to your good looks, and in the nature of things you do not make love to me any longer. Love may be the most delightful thing in the world, but it cannot resist the pressure of daily intercourse. It is doomed when it has to look over a common visiting list, and scold the same house-steward about the weekly expenditure. “ *Ah—ouiche*, Madame ! ” said one of the peasants at Amyôt to me once, “ where is love when you dip two spoons in one soup-pot ?—you only quarrel about the onions.” That is

always the fault of marriage. It is always putting two spoons in one pot. Whether it is an earthen pitcher or a Cellini vase does not make the least difference. Poor love runs away from the clash of the spoons.'

Othmar laughed, but he was irritated. 'I should be miserable if I believed you were in earnest,' he said impatiently. 'But I know you would sacrifice your own life to an epigram.'

'I am entirely in earnest,' she replied. 'But if you do not believe me that shows that you are a less changeable man than most, or I a wiser woman. Ah, my dear,' she added, with a smile and a sigh, 'when men do not admire me any longer then you will not admire me either, I imagine; I wonder you do as it is—you see so much of me!'

'I shall adore you all my life,' said Othmar, with almost as much fervour as when he had been the most impassioned and the most hopeless of her lovers.

'You fancy so; and that is very pretty in you, after so many years; but it does not follow that you will think so still in twelve months' time,' said his wife, with the smile of her in-

curable scepticism upon her lips. 'And do not insist on it too much. Things which are insisted on too much have a knack of making themselves tiresome, and you know of old that repetition has no great charm for me, and say what you will you cannot prevent me from feeling that very soon I shall grow old!'

She rose and looked over her shoulder at the silver-framed mirror with its three glasses, showing her profile to her as she turned.

'I could not brave the sunrise after a ball *now*,' she thought, with a little pang.

'Has not a poet said,' she added aloud :

I fear

Life's many changes ; not Death's changelessness ?'

There was a touch of graver sadness in the tone with which she quoted the line of verse, which forbade reply either by persiflage or compliment.

Othmar kissed her hand with almost the same emotion as when he had declared to her a passion hopeless, and therefore for the time changeless ; and he remained mute.

'The same poet says :

Love's words are weak, but not Love's silences ;

she added, with a smile. 'Well, I will believe you——as yet.'

She had in nowise resigned the power of, and the diversion afforded her by, what in a lesser person would have been called endless flirtation. She amused herself constantly with the follies of men and their subjugation.

'If you do not make yourself attractive to others, the man to whom you care to be attractive will soon not find you so,' she was wont to say. 'Those women who make themselves a statue of fidelity, like the Queen in the "Winter's Tale," will soon be left alone on their pedestals. Be as faithful as you please, but show him that you have every temptation and opportunity to be unfaithful if you did please.'

It was on those lines that she had traced her conduct, and whilst her world knew that she was unaltered in coquetry, if coquetry her languid charm and domination could be called, it also saw that she was equally unaltered in profound and universal indifference to all those whom she subjugated. Othmar, as he said, would have preferred that she should subjugate none. But she frankly told him that it was of

no use to wish for subversion of the laws of nature. 'I am as nature made me,' she said once to him. 'If you did not like the way I was made, why did you not leave me alone? You had plenty of time to study me. I am like Disraeli, I like power. Now the only power possible to a woman is that which she possesses over men. If men were more interesting, the power would be more interesting too. But then it is not our fault. It is perhaps the fault of the millions of stupid women who swallow up the occasional originality of men as sand swallows up the bits of agate and cornelian on the shore. It is the fashion to say that it is the wicked, clever women who hurt men. That is not the case; it is the good silly ones who make of life the sahara of commonplaces and of blunders which it is. Talent will at least always understand; blameless stupidity understands nothing.'

She was somewhat more, rather than less, of a *charmeuse* than she had been. It was so natural to her to charm the lives of men that she could have as soon ceased to breathe as to cease to use her power over them. There were times when Othmar grew irritated and

jealous, but she was unmoved by his anger.

‘It is a much greater compliment to you that men should admire me,’ she said to him, ‘and it would look supremely absurd if I lapsed into a *bonne bourgeoisie*, and always went everywhere arm-in-arm with you. I should not know myself. You would not know me. Be content. You are aware that I think very little about any one of them ; they are none of them so interesting as you used to be. But I must have them about me. They are like my fans ; I never scarcely use a fan or look at one, but still a fan is indispensable ; it is a part of one’s toilette.’

Othmar, who retained for her much of the imperious and perfervid passion which he had had as a lover, resigned himself with a bad grace to her arguments. Something of the old tyrannical feeling with which he would once have liked to bear her out of sight and hearing of the world for ever still moved in him at times, though he had grown diffident of displaying it, having grown afraid of her delicate ironies.

‘It is so good for him,’ she said to herself ;

‘that sort of irritation and jealousy keeps his affections and his admirations alive: they are not allowed to go to sleep, as both have a knack of going to sleep in marriage. Anything is less dangerous than stagnant water. If a man be not made jealous he must drift imperceptibly into indifference. Monotony is like a calm at sea; everyone yawns, and in time even a shark would be welcomed as a delightful interruption. To avoid sameness is the first requisite for the endurance of love. If he love me as much as he did nine years ago—and I think he does—it is only because at the bottom of his heart he never feels absolutely sure of me. He has always a faint unacknowledged sense that I may any day do something entirely unexpected by him; may even fly away, as a bird does, off a bough which it has tired of. I am like a book of alchemy to him, of which he has mastered all the secrets save just one or two lines, but in which those lines always remain in unintelligible abracadabra to perplex and interest him. He will never tire of the book till he thinks he can decipher those lines. It is a mistake to suppose that men are only allured by their senses; there is an intellectual mystery which fascinates them, and

which is not so easily exhausted. All men are amused by me, all men are more or less attracted by me. I should not wish my husband, alone of all men, to become tired of me. Of course it is very difficult to prevent it when he is so used to me, but I think it is possible.'

A feeble woman, a dull woman, a woman of that kind of self-complacency which goes with stupidity, would not have allowed so much even in her own thoughts; but she, who was deemed the vainest of her kind, had no such vanity wherewith to deceive herself. Her high intelligence and her unerring penetration were glasses forever turned upon herself no less than upon others. Othmar was at times surprised and almost irritated that she left him so often to go on her own visits or travels, or sent him alone upon his. But she knew very well what she did.

'Frequent absences are like those pauses in the music which in French we call *silences*, and in German *Pausen*,' she said to herself. 'They make us care for the music more than we should do if it were always on our ear. Monotony is the most terrible enemy that affection or enjoyment ever has. Unfortunately,

most women are so eternally monotonous that they can never understand why men are not as pleased with the defect as they are themselves. Lord Beaconsfield was not an apostle of love, but he was a shrewd observer of mankind, and I always think that he suggested the most admirable phase of modern love possible, when he depicted two people who were fond of one another as going their different ways every evening to different houses, and meeting again to talk it all over with champagne and chicken at dawn. If people are always together in the same places, what have they left to tell one another in their own house? Myself, I don't like either champagne or chicken, but that is a mere matter of detail. You can say, Rhine wine and green oysters, or yellow tea and Russian cigarettes. It is, no doubt, only another form of vanity; but I wish our lives not to break down and drift away in little bits of wreck wood, as most peoples' lives do. It is not goodness in me; it is only *amour propre*.'

She had more sympathy for him than she would in other years have supposed herself capable of feeling, but with her regard for him

there was mingled that habit of analysis which was so inveterate in her, and that indulgence to his weaknesses which arose from her condescending comprehension of them. She, as yet, made the preservation of his admiration her study, but in her study there was blended the sense of amusement and disdain, which always came to her before the inconsistencies and the unwisdom of men. She loved him perhaps ; but she never failed to weigh him accurately. To Yseulte, he had been as a lord and a god ; to her he was dearer than other men, but not more imposing. Even when the first winelike fumes of awakened passion had touched her, she had been clear of judgment and unerring in vision. She had said to herself : ‘He looked larger than others once, through the mists of my preference, but he is not so really.’

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN he saw the beauty of her children, Friedrich Othmar relented in that unsparing bitterness which he felt against her. As a woman he still hated her intensely, unspeakably, unchangeably, but as their mother he had respect for her, and almost pardon.

‘He will be childless all his days,’ he had said with certainty and scorn. ‘That bloodless *mondaine*, that ethereal coquette will leave the name barren ; she is all brain and nerve ; she will never give birth to anything save an epigram.’

When his words had been disproved, he had rendered her a sullen honour. He would take no joy in the children as he would have taken joy in Yseulte’s ; but they were there to bear the name he thought so precious, and he was forced to confess that no lovelier or stronger or healthier creatures than the young Otho and

his sister Xenia ever could have played beneath the oak-boughs of Amyôt.

But the old man was faithful to the one innocent affection which had ever lived in his selfish breast; with an aching heart he would often turn from watching these children tumble amongst the daisies in the sunshine, and find his way to a solitary tomb made in white marble in the mausoleum of Amyôt, in memory of her whose slender crushed body lay buried amongst the violets by the sea of the southern shore.

‘All that weight of marble!’ he thought, ‘and not one little sigh of regret!’

Not one; unless he gave it.

‘I hate this Russian woman, but I am bound to say that the children are beautiful,’ he said once to Melville. ‘I am bound to say, too, that she has made a change for the better in Otho. Since he has discovered (doubtless) that every *grande passion* has its perihelion and its decline, he has become more like other men. He has interested himself in the welfare of the House. He has condescended to be conscious that Europe exists. He has lived the natural life of the world, and has, I think, ceased to

wish himself a wandering Wilhelm Meister, a François Villon without a rag to his back. My poor dead child only loved him, and could do nothing to attach him to life or to detach him from his fantastic preoccupations and morbid demands for the impossible. This woman has made him so in love with the actual, with the real, that he has ceased to dream of the ideal. He has even grown aware that his own fate is an enviable one, which for thirty years of his life he obstinately denied.'

'It is a questionable benefit to make a man abandon the ideal,' said Melville. 'I think, however, that Othmar's feeling was always rather impatience of existing facts than thirst of any impalpable perfection. You believe that a discontented man is necessarily an imaginative man. It does not follow. Imagination may perhaps create discontent; but then, on the other hand, it may console it. If he had had imagination enough, he would have found out a thousand idealised ways of using his great wealth.'

'Thank heaven, then, that he has so little,' said Friedrich Othmar. 'Myself, I always con-

sidered that he had a great deal too much. I do not underrate imagination in its proper place. None of the great events of the world would have taken place without it: every great revolutionist, every great conqueror, every great statesman, even, must possess it; but it is a perilous quality, singularly similar to nitroglycerine; you can never be certain of the hour and the sphere of its action; it may pierce a new road for humanity to use after it, or it may wreck nations and send humanity backward by a thousand years.'

'I should not mind going back a thousand years,' murmured Melville. 'Basil was living, and Augustine.'

Since the death of Yseulte these two men, so dissimilar, even so inharmonious, had become in a manner friends. Their mutual pain had drawn them together. The thought which was the same in the minds of each, and which each understood in the other without speech, made a link of union between them. Both divined the secret of her death. Neither ever spoke of it.

'He is a priest, but he is a man,' said Friedrich Othmar of Melville, who in turn said of him:

‘He is encrusted all over with gold, egotism, and disbelief; but beneath that crust there is the heart of humanity.’

And they shook hands across the profound gulf of sentiment and opinion which divided them.

‘I think that, for once, the wise Baron is mistaken,’ reflected Melville, without saying his thoughts aloud. ‘Othmar may have grown less imaginative, because most men do as they grow older, unless they be truly poets. But I do not think he is a whit more contented. I believe, if he could see into his heart, that he has found his apple of paradise not very much richer in flavour than a common rennet!’

But he forbore to say so. What business was it of his? Only, being the profound student of the comedy and tragedy of humanity that he was, he could not help feeling a keen interest in watching the issues of this marriage of love

Melville, like all persons of fine penetration and quick sympathies, was deeply interested in all characters which were out of the common lines of human nature, and whenever his busy years had any leisure he spent it where he

could observe all those who interested him most.

Of all these the Lady of Amyôt had the most powerful interest for him. But for his years and his priest's frock, it might have been a more tender and profound sentiment still with which she inspired him. For Melville, as for all men of intellect, the very despondency she cast over them, the very intricacy and unsatisfying changeability of her character, possessed the most powerful charm. But whether these were qualities which would make *bon ménage* in the familiarity and the triviality of daily life—of this he was not so sure.

CHAPTER V.

SHE, who had been so exacting as a friend, was not in any way exacting as a wife. There were a generosity and a breadth of thought in her, which made her accord freedom in proportion to what lesser minds would have considered her right to deny it. She held the whole ordinary mass of womanhood in too absolute a disdain for her ever to stoop to the same ways and weaknesses as theirs. She might have been the most despotic of mistresses : she was the most lenient of wives. Tyranny, which would have seemed, did still seem, to her natural and amusing when used over lives which in no way belonged to her, would have appeared to her *bourgeois* and ridiculous exercised over her husband : that sort of thing was only fit for two shopkeepers of Belleville. She had too supreme a scorn for the Penelopes of the world, whose jealousy was as impotent as

their charms, not to let the reins which she drew so tightly over others lie loose and unfelt on the shoulders of Othmar.

‘Penelope thinks that no object in all created nature is more lovely and important than her distaff; naturally Ulysses gets sick of the sight of it,’ she said once. ‘Why are all women, in love with their husbands, much more miserable than those who detest them? Only because they insist upon giving so much of themselves, that the men grow to view them with absolute terror, as the Strasbourg goose views the balls of maize paste. Love is an art, and ought to be dealt with artistically; in marriage, it has to contend with such insuperable difficulties that it needs to be most delicate, most sagacious, most forbearing, most intelligent, to surmount them. Instead of which, women, usually, who have any love for their husbands at all, look on them as so much property inalienably assigned to them, and treat them as Cosmo dei Medici treated Florence: “*Mi piace più distruggerla che perderla!*”’

Othmar himself had changed little; men at his years do not alter physically, though great

changes, moral and mental, may in brief time transform their feelings and their ambitions.

Women looked at him inquisitively many a day, to try and see whether that great wonder-flower of romantic passion, which had astonished his world in a generation in which such passions are rare, had brought forth contentment or disenchantment. But they could not be sure. No one had ever succeeded in making him unfaithful to this great love, which had been merged in marriage, but no one had ever penetrated his confidence sufficiently to satisfy themselves whether any disillusion had followed on the fulfilment of those dreams and desires, to which he had been willing to sacrifice his life, his honour, and his soul. All that society in general, or his most familiar friends could see, was the outward pageantry of a life in the great world; that life which leaves so little space for thought, so little time for regret, so little leisure for conscience to speak or memory to waken. If he were not entirely content he allowed no one to suspect so; and he did not even like to admit it to his own reflections: yet there were times when life did not seem to him much more complete than it had .

done before he had attained the supreme desire of his heart; there were times when the old vague indefinite dissatisfaction came back to him—the sense of emptiness which moved the Cæsars of Rome with the world at their feet.

‘I suppose it is inevitable,’ he said to himself. ‘I suppose she is right; nothing on earth is content except a sucking child and an oyster.’

It irritated him that he should be pursued by this foolish and shapeless sense of still missing something, still desiring something, still seeking something unknown and unknowable; but it was there at the bottom of most of his thoughts, at the core of most of his feelings.

‘You have had a great misfortune all your life,’ Friedrich Othmar said once to him. ‘You have always had all your wishes granted you. When a child is indulged in that way he kicks his nurse, when a man is indulged in that way he sulks at destiny. It is human nature.’

‘Human nature,’ said Othmar, ‘according to you and Nadège, is such a consummate fool that it is scarcely worth the bread it eats, much less the elaborate analysis which philosophers have expended on it from Solomon to Renan.’

Friedrich Othmar shrugged his shoulders.

‘It is not always a fool,’ he made answer ;
‘but it is, I think, always an ingrate.’

Was he himself an ingrate? Or did he only suffer from that inevitable law of recoil and rebound which governs human life ; that cessation of tension which makes a great passion, once satisfied and become familiar, like a bow unstrung?

There is always a pathetic reaction, a curious sense of loss in the midst of possession, which follows on the attainment of every great desire. If anyone had told him that he was not perfectly happy, he would have indignantly denied the accuracy of their assertion. Whenever any misgiving that he was not so arose in his own mind, he repulsed it with contempt as the mere ungrateful rebelliousness of human nature. Yet now and then a vague sense that his life was not much more perfect than it had been before the desires of his heart had been given to him, occasionally came over him, though he always thrust it away.

She herself felt sometimes an almost irresistible inclination to say to him : ‘And you, you who set your soul on marriage with me, have

you found the lasting joys that you expected, or have you learned that the fulfilment of a dream is never quite the dream itself—has always some glory wanting?’

But she refrained. Women are always so unwise when they ask those questions, she reflected; so like children who pull up the plants in their garden to see what growth or what roots they have.

‘We are just like anybody else, after all!’ she did say once, with a mingling of despondency and of humour. ‘I suppose we cannot escape from the age we live in, which is neither original nor imaginative, nor anything that I know of, except feverish and unhappy. Mr. Lawrence Oliphant, certainly, is gone to live in Syria, and we might do the same, but would it be any better? Do you think life is any larger there? I should be afraid there are only more mosquitoes.’

‘I imagine we should only find in Syria what we took there, as Madame de Swetchine said of Rome,’ replied Othmar, with some discontent. ‘Life is an incomplete thing; unsatisfactory because its passions are finite, its years few, and its time of slow development

and of slow decline wholly disproportionate, as you said just now, to its short moment of attainment and maturity; and also because habit, routine, prejudice, human stupidity, have all contrived to weight it with unnecessary burdens, to bind it with needless and intolerable laws, to take all the glow and spontaneity and rebound out of it. Conventionality is its curse.'

'And marriage!' said his wife. 'Oh, my dear, I do not mean to be unpleasant, but you know it is indisputably true that I should have been much fonder of you, and you of me, if we had never married each other. There is something stifling in marriage; it confounds love with property. I often wonder how the human race ever contrived to make such a mistake popular or universal.'

'It is not I who say that,' said Othmar with a touch of embarrassment.

'Oh no; but you think it. Every man thinks it,' she replied tranquilly. 'I often wonder,' she continued more dreamily, 'how it will be when you love some other woman. You will some day—of course you will. I wonder what will happen——'

'How can you do such injustice to me and

to yourself? I shall never care for any other living thing.'

She looked at him through the shadow of her drooped lids.

'Oh yes, you will,' she repeated. 'It is inevitable. The only thing I am not sure about is how I shall take it. It will all depend, I think, on whether you confide in me, or hide it from me.'

'It would be a strange thing to confide in you!'

'Not at all. That is a conventional idea, and the idea of a stupid man. You are not stupid. I should certainly be the person most interested in knowing such a fact, and if you did tell me frankly, I think—I think I should be unconventional and clever enough not to quarrel with you. I think I should understand. But if you hid it from me, then——'

The look passed over her face which the dead Napraxine had used to fear as a hound fears the whip, and which Othmar had never seen.

'Then, I give you leave to deal me any death you like with your own hand,' he said with a laugh, which was a little forced because a certain chill had passed over him.

She laughed also.

‘Well, be wise,’ she said as she rose; ‘you are warned in time. Oh, my dear Otho, you grant yourself that every passion is finite. I think it is; but I think also that the wise people, when it fades, make it leave friendship and sympathy behind it, as the beautiful blowing yellow corn when it is cut leaves the wheat. The foolish people let it leave all kinds of rancour, envy, and uncharitableness, as the brambles and weeds when they are burnt only leave behind them a foul smoke. But it is so easy to be philosophic in theory!’

‘Your philosophy far exceeds mine,’ said Othmar with a little impatience. ‘I have not yet reached the period at which I can calmly contemplate my green April fields laid sear to give corn to the millstones; they are all in flower with the poppy and the campion.’

‘Very prettily said,’ replied his wife. ‘You really are a poet at heart.’

Othmar went out from her presence that day with a vague sense of depression and of apprehension.

He had never wavered in his great love for her; the great passion with which she had in-

spired him still remained with him ardent and profound in much ; the charm she had for his intelligence sustained the seduction for his senses ; he loved her, only her, as much and as exclusively as in the early days of his acquaintance with her ; she still remained the one woman upon earth for him. He could not hear her calmly speak of any future in which she would be less than then to him without a sense of irritation and offence. It seemed to him that such deliberate and unsparing analysis as hers could not exist side by side with any very intense feeling. Certainly he was used to it in her ; he was accustomed to her delicate and critical dissection of every human motive and impulse, his, her own, or those of others ; but it touched him now with a sense of pain, as though the scalpel had penetrated to some open nerve. His consciousness of his own devotion to her made him indignantly repulse the suggestion that he could ever change ; yet his own knowledge of the nature of humanity and of the work of time told him that she had had truth on her side when she had said that such a change might come, would come ; and he thrust the consciousness of that truth away as an insult

and affront. Was there nothing which would endure and resist the cruel slow sapping of the waves of time? Was there no union, passion, or fidelity, strong enough to stand the dull fallings of the years like drops of grey rain which beat down the drooping rose and change it from a flower of paradise to a poor, pale, scentless wreck of itself?

CHAPTER VI.

ON this the unwelcome anniversary of her birth, she was at St. Pharamond, which had been connected with the grounds of La Jacquemerille by the purchase, at great cost, of all the intervening flower-fields and olive-woods. It had been her whim to do so, and Othmar had not opposed it, though he would have preferred never again to see those shores; but, although she never spoke to him on that subject, she herself chose to go there with most winters, for the very reason that the world would sooner have expected her to shun the scenes of Yseulte's early and tragic death. She invariably did whatever her society expected her not to do, and the vague sense of self-blame with which her conscience was moved, whenever she remembered the dead girl, was sting enough to make her display an absolute oblivion and indifference which, for once, she did not feel.

She never remained long upon the Riviera ; she seldom stayed long anywhere, except it were at Amyôt ; but she went thither always when the violets were thick in the valleys, and the yellow blossoms of the butterwort were flung like so many golden guineas over the brown furrows of the fields. The children spent the whole winter there. This day, when they had wished her *bonne fête*, and brought her their great baskets of white lilac and gardenias, she was indulgent to them, and took them with her in her carriage for a drive after her noonday breakfast. She was not a woman to whom the babble and play of children could ever be very long interesting ; her mind was too speculative, too highly cultured, too exacting to give much response to the simplicity, the ignorance, and the imperfect thoughts of childhood. But in her own way she loved them. In her own way she took great care of their education, physical and mental. She wished her son to become a man whom the world would honour ; and she wished her daughter to be wholly unlike herself.

As yet they were hardly more than babies ; lovely, happy, gay, and gentle. ‘ Let them be

young as long as they can,' she said to those entrusted with their training. 'I was never young. It is a great loss. One never wholly recovers it in any after years.'

It was a fine day, mild, sunny, with light winds shaking the odour from the orange buds; such a day as that on which Platon Napraxine had died. She did not think of him.

Several years had gone away since then; the whole world seemed changed; the dead past had buried its dead; there were the two golden-haired laughing children in symbol and witness of the present.

'Decidedly, however philosophic we may be, we are all governed at heart by sentiment,' she thought, as the carriage rolled through the delicate green of the blossoming woods. 'And by beauty,' she added, as her eyes dwelt on the faces of Otho and Xenia, who were the very flower and perfection of childish loveliness; ideal children also, who were always happy, always caressing, always devoted to each other, and whose little lives were as pretty as those of two harebells in a sunny wood. Why were they dear to her, and sweet and charming? Why had the physical

pain of their birth been forgotten in the mental joys of their possession? Why did her eyes delight to follow their movements, and her ear delight to listen to their laughter?

The other children had been as much hers, and she had always disliked them; she disliked them still, such time as she went to their Russian home to receive their annual homage, and that of all her dependents.

Othmar was devoted to the interests of Napraxine's two little sons; an uneasy consciousness, often recurrent to him, that he had not merited the frank and steady friendship of the dead man, perpetually impelled him to the greatest care of their fortunes and education. They were kindly, stupid, vigorous little lads, likely to grow into the image of their dead father; but all that could be done for them in mind and body, for their present and their future, he took heed should be done; and placing them under wise and gentle teachers, endeavoured to counteract the fatal instincts to vanity and overbearing self-esteem which the adulation and submission they received everywhere on their estates had implanted in them long before they could spell. He never

saw them come into his presence without painful memories and involuntary repugnance; but he repressed all signs of either, and the children, if they feared him, liked him. Of their mother they saw but very little: a lovely delicate vision, in an atmosphere scented like a tea rose, with a little sound in her voice which made them feel they must tread softly and speak low, looked at them with an expression which they did not understand, and touched them with cool fragrant lips lightly and distantly, and they knew she was their mother because they had always heard so: but Othmar seemed nearer to them than she did, and when they wished for anything, it was to him that they addressed their little rude scrawled notes. For the rest, they were always in Russia: it was the only stipulation with which their father had hampered their mother's guardianship of them.

'Let them be Russians always,' he had said in his last letter to her. 'Let them love no soil but Russia. The curse of Russians is the foreign life, the foreign tongue, the foreign ways, which draw them away from their people, make their lands unknown and

indifferent to them, and lead them to squander on foreign cities and on foreign wantons the roubles wrung by their stewards in their absence from their dependents. Paris is the *succursale* of Petersburg, and it is also its hell. When the Russian nobles shall live in their own homes, the Nihilist will have little justification, and the Jew will be unable to drain the peasantry as a cancer drains the blood. I preach what I have not practised. But if I could live my life again, I would spend my strength, and my gold, and my years amongst my own people.'

'Poor Platon !' she had thought, more than once remembering those words. 'He thinks he would have done so, but he would not. The first *drôlesse* who should have crossed the frontier would have taken him back with her in triumph. It is quite true what he says ; an absent nobility leaves an open door behind them, through which Sedition creeps in to jump upon their vacant chairs. But so long as ever they have the power, men will go where they are amused, and the Russian *tchin* will not stay in the provinces, in the snow, with the wolves, and the Jews, and the drunken villagers

all around his house, when he can live in the Avenue Joséphine, and never hear or see anything but what pleases him. Absenteeism ruined Ireland, and will ruin Russia; but, *tant que le monde est monde*, the man who has only one little short life of his own will like to enjoy it.'

Nevertheless, she and Othmar both respected his wishes, and his boys were brought up in the midst of the vast lands of their heritage, with everything done that could be done by tuition to amend their naturally slow intelligence and outweigh the stubbornness and arrogance begotten by centuries of absolute dominion in the race they sprang from. She herself only saw them very rarely, when, in midsummer weather, the flowering seas of grass and the scent of the violets in the larch woods brought life and warmth even to North-eastern Russia. They were unpleasant to her: always unpleasant. They were the living and intrusive records of years she would willingly have effaced. They were involuntary but irresistible reproaches spoken, as it were, by lips long dumb in death.

Living, their father had never had power to

do otherwise than offend, irritate, and disgust her: the least active sentiment against himself that he had ever roused in her had been a contemptuous pity. But dead, there were moments when Platon Napraxine acquired both dignity and strength in her eyes: the silence of his death and its cause had commanded her respect: he had been wearisome, stupid, absurd, troublesome, in all his life; but in his death he had gained a certain grandeur, as features quite coarse and commonplace will look solemn and white on their bier.

He had died to defend her name, and she could not remember ever once having given him one kind word! There had been a greatness in his loyalty and in his sacrifice to its demands which outweighed the clumsiness of his passion and the grotesqueness of his ignorance. 'If he were living again, I should be as intolerant of him as I ever was,' she thought at times; 'he would annoy me as much as ever, he would be as ridiculous, he would be as odious; and yet I should like for once to be able to say to him "*Pauvre ours! vous êtes mal léché, mais vous avez bon cœur!*"'

It was a vague remorse, but a sincere one;

yet in her nature it irritated and did not alter her. It was an intrusive thought, and unwelcome as had been his presence. She thrust it away as she had used to bid her women lock the doors of her chamber; and the poor ghost went away obediently, timid, wistful, not daring to insist, as the living man had used to do from the street door.

Remorse is a vast persistent shadow in the poet's metrical romance and the dramatist's tragic story; but in the great world, in the pleasant world, in the world of movement, of distraction, of society, it is but a very faint mist, which at very distant intervals clouds some tiny space in a luminous sky, and hurries away before a breath of fashion, a whisper of news, a puff of novelty, as though conscious of its own incongruity and want of tact.

When their drive was over this day she dismissed the young Otho and his sister to their nurses and teachers, and remained on the sea-terrace of St. Pharamond with some friends about her. It was the last day in February, a day of warm winds and full sunshine and fragrant warmth. The air was

penetrated with the sweet breath of primroses and the scented narcissus which were blossoming by millions under the woods of St. Pharamond. The place had been beautiful before, and under her directions had become as perfect a sea palace as the south coast of Europe could show anywhere. She had had a terrace made ; a long line of rose-coloured marble overhanging the sea, backed by palms and araucarias, with sheltered seats that no angry breeze could find out, and wide staircases descending to the smooth sands below. Here, lying on the cushions and white bearskins, and leaning one elbow on the balustrade, she could watch all the width of the waters as they stretched eastward and westward, and see the manœuvres in the cup-races of her friends' vessels without moving from her own garden. To the sea-terrace, when it was known that she would receive them, came, on such sunny afternoons as this, all those whom she deigned to encourage of the pleasure-seekers on the coast.

To see the sun set from that rose-marble terrace, and to take a Russian cigarette or a cup of caravan tea beneath those araucaria branches, was the most coveted distinction

and one of the surest brevets of fashion in the world. She refused so many; she received so few; she was so inexorable in her social laws; mere rank alone had no weight with her; ambassadors could pass people to courts, but not up those rose-coloured stairs; princes and princesses, if they were dull, had no chance to be made welcome; and, in fine, to become an *habitué* there required so many perfections that the majority of the great world never passed the gates at all.

‘The first qualification for admittance is that they must find something new to say every day,’ she said to the Duc de Béthune, who was in an informal way her first chamberlain. ‘The second is, that they must always amuse me.’

‘The first clause a few might perhaps fulfil; but who shall attain to fulfilment of the second?’

‘That will remain to be seen,’ she said with a little yawn, while she reclined on the white furs and the Eastern tissues, her feet on a silver globe of hot water and her hands clasped idly on a tortoiseshell field-glass. It was five o’clock; the western sky was a burning vault of rose and gold; the zenith had the deep divine blue that is like nothing else in all

creation ; the sea was radiant, purple here, azure there, opal elsewhere, as the light fell on it ; delicate winds blew across it violet-scented from the land ; the afternoon sun was warm, and as its light deepened made the pale rose of the marbles glow like the flowers of a pomegranate tree. She forgot her companions ; she leaned her head against her cushions and dreamily thought of many things ; of the day she had first come thither most of all. It had been nine years before.

Nine years !—what an eternity ! She remembered the bouquet which Othmar had given her on the head of the sea-stairs. What a lover he had been !—a lover out of a romance—Lelio, Ruy Blas, Romeo—anything you would. What a pity to have married him ! It had been commonplace, *banal*, stupid—anybody would have done it. There had been a complete absence of originality in such a conclusion to their story.

If Laura had married Petrarca, who would have cared for the sonnets ?

She laughed a little as she thought so. Her companions hoped they had succeeded in amusing her. She had not heard a word they were

saying. She gazed dreamily at the sea through her eyelids, which looked shut, and pursued her own reflections.

Her companions of the moment were all men; the most notable of them were Melville, the Duc de Béthune, and a Russian, Loris Loswa.

Melville, on the wing between Rome and Paris, loitered a week or two in Nice, doing his best to shake alms for good works out of the sinners there, and lifting up the silver clarion of his voice against the curse of the *tripot* with unsparing denunciation.

The Duc de Béthune was there because for twelve years of his still young life he had been uneasy whenever many miles were between him and the face of his lady, whom he adored with the hopeless and chivalrous passion of which he had sustained the defence at the Court of Love at Amyôt. He would have carried her muff or her ribbon to the scaffold, like d'Aubiac and Montmorin, whom he had cited there. He had been almost the only one of her lovers whom she had deigned to take the trouble to preserve as a friend. He had been inspired at first sight with an intense passion

for her, which had coloured and embittered some of the best years of his life. On the death of Napraxine he had been amongst the first to lay the offer of his life at her feet. She had rejected him, but without her customary mockery, even with a certain regret; and she had employed all the infinite power of her charms and tact of her intelligence to retain him as a companion whilst rejecting him as a suitor. Such a position had seemed at first impossible to him, and had been long painful; but at last he chose rather to see her on those distant terms than never, and gradually, as time passed on, he grew familiarised to the sight of her as the wife of Othmar, and the love he bore to her softened into regard, and lost its sting and its torment.

In person he was handsome and distinguished-looking to a great degree; he resembled the portrait of Henri Quatre, and bore himself like the fine soldier he was; he had a grave temperament and a romantic fancy; the cradle of his race was a vast dark fortress overhanging the iron-bound rocks of Finisterre, and his early manhood had been ushered in by the terrible tragedies of the

année terrible. As volunteer with the Army of the North, Gui de Béthune had seen the darkest side of war and life ; he had been but a mere youth then, but the misfortunes of his country had added to the natural seriousness of his northern temper. The most elegant of gentlemen in the great world of Paris, he yet had never abandoned himself as utterly as most men of his age and rank to the empire of pleasure ; there was a certain reserve and dignity in him which became the cast of his features and the gravity and sweetness of his voice.

But he never loved any other woman. And unconsciously to herself she was so used to consider that implicit and exclusive devotion to her as one of her rights, that she would have been astonished, even perhaps annoyed, had she seen that he took his worship elsewhere. Her remembrance had spoiled twelve years of the promise of his manhood, but if anyone had reproached her with that, she would have said sincerely enough, ‘I cannot help his adoring me.’ She would have even taken credit to herself for the unusual kindness with which she had endeavoured to turn the sirocco of love

into the mild and harmless breeze of friendly sympathy.

The Duc de Béthune was one of those conquests which flattered even her sated and fastidious vanity ; and she had been touched to unwonted feeling by the delicate, chivalrous and lofty character of the loyalty he gave her so long.

She jested at him often, but she respected him always ; occasionally she irritated Othmar by saying to him, half in joke and half in earnest :

‘ Sometimes I almost wish that I had married Béthune ! ’

That he remained unmarried for her sake was always agreeable to her.

Loris Loswa was, on the contrary, one of the gayest of her many servitors. By birth noble and poor, he had been early compromised in a students’ revolt at Kieff, and through family influence had been allowed self-exile instead of deportation to Tobolsk. He had turned his steps to Paris, and, possessing great facility for art, had pursued the study seriously and so successfully, that before he was thirty he had become one of the most noted artists in France.

He had a wonderful talent for the portraiture of women. No one rendered with so much grace, so much charm, so much delicate flattery, running deftly in the lines of truth, the peculiar beauties of the *mondaine*, in which, however much nude nature may have done, art always does still more. All that subtle, indescribable loveliness of the woman of society, which is made up of so many details of tint and costume, and manner and style, and a thousand other subtle indescribable things, was caught and fixed by the brush or by the crayon of Loris Loswa with a power all his own, and a fidelity which became the most charming of compliments. Ruder artists, truer perhaps to art than he, grumbled at his method and despised his renown. '*Faiseur de chiffons*' some students wrote once upon his door; and there were many of his brethren who pretended that his creations were nothing more than audacious, and unrealy brilliant, trickeries.

But detraction did not lock the wheels of his triumphal chariot; it glided along with inconceivable rapidity through the pleasant avenues of popular admiration. And his art pleased too many connoisseurs of elegant taste

and cultured sight not to have in it some higher and finer qualities than his enemies allowed to it. He had magical colouring, and as magical a touch ; a woman's portrait, under his treatment, became gorgeous as a sunbird, delicate as an orchid, ethereal as a butterfly floating down a sunbeam. Then he was at times arrogant in his pretensions, fastidious in his selections of sitters ; he was given to call himself an amateur, which at once disarmed his critics and increased his vogue ; he was an aristocrat, and very good-looking, which did not diminish his popularity with any class of women ; and what increased it still more was, that he refused many more sitters than he accepted. Not to have been painted in water-colours, or drawn in pastel by Count Loris Loswa, was to any *élégante* to be a step behind-hand in fashion ; to have a pearl missing from her crown of distinction.

‘If anyone could paint dew on a cobweb it would be Loswa,’ a great critic had said one day. ‘Have you never seen dew on a cobweb ? It is the most beautiful thing in the world, especially when a sunbeam trembles through it.’

His present hostess had a high opinion of

his powers, mingled with a certain depreciation of them. 'Perhaps it is only a trick,' she admitted; 'but it is a divine trick—a trick of Hermes.'

He leaned now over the balustrade of the terrace of St. Pharamond, the warmth of the western sun shining on his fair curls and straight profile.

'A coxcomb can never be a genius,' murmured the Duc de Béthune, glancing towards him with sovereign contempt and dislike.

'You are always very *porté* against poor Loris,' returned his hostess with a smile. 'Yes, he has genius in a way, the same sort of genius that Watteau had, and Coustou and Boucher; he should have been born under Louis Quinze; that is his only mistake.'

'He is a coxcomb,' repeated Béthune.

'He seems so to you, because all your life has been filled with grave thoughts and strong actions. All artists are apt to seem mere triflers to all soldiers. Who is that girl he is looking at?—what a handsome face!'

She raised herself a little on her elbow, and looked down over the balustrade; a small boat with a single red sail and two women under it

were passing under the terrace ; one of them was old, brown and ugly, the other was young, fair, and with golden-brown hair curling under a red woollen fisher's cap. The water was shallow under the marble walls of St. Pharamond ; the boat was drifting very slowly ; there was a pile of oranges and lemons in it as its cargo ; the elder woman, with one oar in the water, was with her other hand counting copper coins into a leathern bag in her lap ; the younger, who steered with a string tied to her foot, was managing the sail with a practised skill which showed that all maritime exercises were familiar to her. When she sat down again she looked up at the terrace above her.

She had a beautiful and uncommon countenance, full of light ; the light of youth, of health, of enjoyment ; she wore a gown of rough dark-blue sea-stuff much stained with salt water, and the sleeves of it were rolled up high, showing the whole of her bare and admirably moulded arms. The memories of Melville and of his hostess both went back to the day when they had seen another boat upon those waters with the happy loveliness of youth within it.

Loris Loswa, full of outspoken admiration, exhausted all his epithets of praise as he watched the little vessel drift by them, slowly, very slowly, for there was no wind to aid it, and the oar was motionless in the water.

‘Stay, oh stay!’ he cried to the boat, and began to murmur the ‘*Enfant, si j’étais roi*——’

‘If you were a king you could hardly do better than what, I am quite sure, you will do as it is,’ said Nadine. ‘Find out where she lives, and make her portrait for next year’s Salon. She is very handsome, and that old scarlet cap is charming. Let us recompense her for passing, and astonish her.’

As she spoke she drew a massive gold bracelet off her own arm, and leaning farther down over the marble parapet, threw it towards the girl. Her aim was good; the boat was almost motionless, the bracelet was very weighty; it fell with admirable precision where it was intended to fall—on the knees of the girl as she sat in the prow behind the pile of golden fruit.

‘How astonished and pleased she will be!’ said Loswa. ‘It is only you, Madame, who have such apropos inspirations.’

Even as he spoke the maiden in the boat had taken up the bracelet, looked at it a moment with a frown upon her face, then without a second's pause had sprung to her feet to obtain a better attitude for her effort, and with a magnificent sweep of her bare arm upward and backward cast the thing back again on high on to the balustrade, where it rolled to the feet of its mistress.

Without waiting an instant, she plucked the oars up, one from the hand of the old woman, the other from the bottom of the boat, and with vigorous strokes drove her sluggish old vessel past the terrace wall, never once looking up, and not heeding the cries of her companion. In a few moments, under her fierce swift movements, the boat was several yards away, leaving the shallow water for the deeper, and hidden altogether from the gaze of her admirers by the red sail flaked with amber and bistre stains, where wind, and sun, and storm had marked it for their own.

‘What has happened?’ said Melville, who had not understood the episode of the bracelet, rising and coming towards them.

‘We are in Arcadia, Monsignor!’ cried Nadine. ‘A peasant girl rejects a jewel!’

‘Is she a peasant? I should doubt it,’ said Béthune.

Melville looked through one of the spy-glasses.

‘No, no! It is Damaris Bérarde,’ he said as he laid it aside. ‘She is by no means a peasant. She is a great heiress in her own little way, and as proud as if she were dauphine of France.’

‘Damaris! What a pretty name!’ said Loswa. ‘It makes one think of damask roses, and she is rather like one. Where does she live, Monsignor?’

‘She lives with her grandfather on a little island which belongs to him. He is a very well-to-do man, but a great brute in many ways; he is not cruel to the girl, but were she to cross his will I imagine he would be. Krapotkine is his hero and Karl Marx his prophet; he is the most ferocious anarchist. You know the sort of man. It is a sort very common in France, and especially so in the South. Did you give her a jewel, Madame Nadège? Ah! that was a very great offence!

She must have been mortally offended. When that child is *en fête* she has a row of pearls as big as any in your jewel-cases.'

'She looked a poor girl, and I thought I should please her,' said Nadine, with impatience. 'Who was to tell that the owner of pearls as big as sparrows' eggs was rowing in a fruit-boat, bare-armed and bare-headed?'

'Where did you say that she lived?' asked Loswa, curious and interested.

'Oh, on an island a long way off from here,' said Melville, regretting that he had spoken of this source of dissension.

'Take me to that island, Monsignor,' murmured Loris Loswa in his ear.

'Oh, indeed no,' said the priest hastily. 'You are a "cursed aristocrat;" the old man would receive you with a thrust of a pike.'

'I would take my chance of the pike,' said Loswa, 'and I would assure him that the future lies with the Anarchists, for I believe it, and I would not add that I also think that their millennium will be most highly uncomfortable.'

'Will you take *me* to that island, Monsignor?' said Nadine. 'It will not be favourable to fashionable impressionists like Loris.'

Loswa coloured a little with irritation ; he had not thought she would overhear his request. He was, besides, despite his vanity, always vaguely sensible that her admiration of his powers was tinged with contempt.

‘You, Madame!’ cried Melville, cordially wishing that the island of Damaris Bérarde was far away in the Pacific in lieu of a score of leagues off the shores of Savoy. ‘Would I take the world incarnate, the most seductive and irresistible of all its votaries, into a convent of Oblates to torture all the good Sisters condemned to eternal seclusion? That poor little girl is a little recluse, a little barbarian, but she is happy in her solitude, in her *sauvagerie*. Were she once to see the Countess Othmar she would know peace no more.’

‘She must see many very like me if she live a mile or so off these shores,’ said Nadine, dismissing the subject with indifference. ‘I am sure it is she who is to be envied if she can find any entertainment in rowing about in a boat full of oranges. I would do it this moment if it would amuse me, but it would not. That is the penalty of having sophisticated and corrupted tastes. How old is your paragon?’

‘Did I say she was a paragon? She is a good little girl. Her age? I should think fifteen, sixteen; certainly not more. Her birth is rather curious. Her mother was an actress, and her father the master of a fruit-carrying brig; dissimilar enough progenitors. Her father was drowned, and her mother died of nostalgia for the stage; and Damaris was left to the care of her grandfather, the fierce old Communist I have described to you. However, he is not so terrible a bigot after all, for he allowed her to be taught by the Sisters at the Villefranche Convent, as a concession to me when I knew him first, in return for a little service I had done him. He thinks it does not much matter what women do; to him they are only beasts of burden; he likes to see his hung with pearls only as he puts tassels and ribbons on his cows when they are taken to market.’

‘And what service did you render him?’

‘Oh, nothing worth mentioning; a trifle,’ said Melville, who never spoke of his own deeds of heroism, which were many. The old man’s younger and only remaining son had lain dying of Asiatic cholera, brought to the coast

in some infected load of Eastern rags, with which they had manured the olives one hot August day. Not a soul had dared to approach the plague-stricken bed, except the courtly churchman whose smile was so sought by great ladies and whose wit was so prized at dinner-parties. He had not abandoned it until all was over, and with his own hands had aided Jean Bérarde to lay the body of his boy in mother-earth. When the grave was filled up, the old socialist, to whom priests had been as loathliest vermin, gave his knotted work-worn hand to the slender white hand of Melville :

‘The only one that had the courage!’ he muttered. ‘Do not try to do anything with me, it would be no use; but do what you like about the child. I will say nothing. You alone stayed by me to see her uncle die.’

So the girl Damaris had been allowed to go in her boat to learn of the Sisters on the mainland, and had been allowed to go also to Mass on high days and holy days. But Melville saw no necessity to say all this to his worldly friends upon the sea-terrace of St. Pharamond. Nay, he even reproached himself that, in a momentary unconsidered impulse, he

had given the name of the girl to Loswa. Loswa was not perhaps a man to go in cold blood on a seducer's errand, but he was conceited, sensual, egotistic, and accustomed to take his own way without much consideration for its consequences, whether to himself or to others. And the worldly wisdom of Melville told him he had committed an imprudence.

‘Jean Bérarde,’ he continued, ‘of course, abhors priests, and would have a general massacre of the Church. But I chanced to do him a service, as I said, some time ago, and so he allows me now and then to go and sit under his big olives and talk to the child, and even, grudgingly, lets her go to Mass now and then. His past is written clearly enough in the history of Savoy, but he either does not know or does not care anything about his descent. All he does care about are his profits from olives and oranges, and also, I suspect, from smuggling. What is infinitely droll is, that the principles which slew his forefathers and destroyed the cradle of his race have become his own. Perhaps the fury of the *Ça ira* got into him, being begotten, as he was, in that time of blood and flame through

which his progenitors passed. Anyhow, he is the fiercest of socialists now.

‘The Counts de la Bérarde were very mighty people ; almost as great as their suzerains and neighbours, the Counts of Dauphiné. The cradle of their race, of which you may see one tower standing now, was set amongst the glaciers and gorges of the Val St. Christophe ; it stood above the Romanche on a great slope of gneiss, with the snow mountains at its back. Up to the time of Richelieu the Bérardes were omnipotent, and they had sway as far down as the sea coast, and it is said that sea piracy, as well as stoppage of land travellers going on their horses and sumpter mules through the passes, swelled their wealth and their power not a little. All these mountain lords were robbers in those days. If you have never been up as far as the St. Christophe valley, you should go as soon as the weather opens and the roads are passable ; all the *cols* and the *combes* are fine, well worth a little Alpine climbing ; and the Pointe des Écrins may hold its own with the peaks of the Engadine.

‘Well, to revert to the Counts de Bérarde : Richelieu broke the back of their power—it

is odd that a Churchman, doing all he could to strengthen the hands of a king, did in truth lay the first stone of what became centuries after the Revolution!—their chiefs were beheaded on the ramparts of Briançon, their castle in the Alps was razed, and only two or three of their younger scions survived the general destruction of the race. From one of these distant branches, Jean de la Bérarde, who had a small stronghold on the sea, and who became, by all these executions, the head of the family, this old man who owns Bonaventure, and is the rudest and roughest of cruisers and farmers, is lineally descended. I have been at pains to make out his genealogy. These matters always have interest for me, and it is curious to trace how the old patrician strain comes out in the girl, his grand-daughter, though he himself is nothing more than a boor. The Bérardes never recovered the massacres and confiscations of the reign of Louis XIII., though they were small suzerains on the sea-coast up to the days of Louis XV. They then fell into poverty, and lost their hold over their neighbours; the Terror extinguished them entirely;

they were swallowed up in the night of anarchy. But Jean Bérarde of Bonaventure is legally heir of the Count Alain de la Bérarde, who was taken to Toulon, and shot there by the Maratists of Freron and Barras. His only son, being a lad at the time, was saved by disguising himself as a fisherman, and, being utterly beggared by the Jacobins, took to the coasting trade, and in time saved money, married a peasant, and bought the island: my socialist friend was *his* son.

‘That is the story of these people, who in two generations have dropped the very memory of the fierce nobles they sprang from so entirely that the old man on Bonaventure is as rabid a Communist as any man can be who has property and clings to it. There—I have been terribly prosy, and Madame will say that all this genealogy is of no earthly interest to her; and, indeed, it cannot be to any of you, only that to a student of human nature it is always, in a measure, interesting to see how old races look under new hoods.’

‘In this instance,’ said Nadine smiling, ‘the old race looks very pretty under the

Phrygian cap. The girl is unusually handsome. You would be wild to paint her, Loswa, if only she were a duchess !'

'I would ask no better fate as it is,' he replied. 'But perhaps it might not be so easy. The grandfather Bérarde is sure to be a Cerberus.'

'You must air your destructive doctrines before him ; he will be fascinated ; he will not know that you live with the duchesses, and would not trouble yourself actually to walk the length of a boulevard to save All The Russias.'

'I am not a political hypocrite, Madame, though you are pleased to ridicule me as an artistic impostor,' said Loswa, with an angry flush on his face.

She cast the end of her cigarette into the sea.

'Oh no ; you are not a hypocrite ; you would very much like to see the destruction of the whole world, provided only that your own armchair should withstand the shock. There are so many anarchists of that type ; and, indeed, why should you die for politics or creed when you can live and paint such charming pictures ? For your pictures are very charm-

ing, though they are all pearl-powder and point-lace, all satins and brocades, and we are all going to Court in every one of them.'

'Vandyke did not paint beggars,' said Loswa, who would have lost his temper had he dared.

She looked at him with amusement.

'But you are not Vandyke, my dear Loris; you are, at most, Lely or Boucher, and the pearl-powder has got into your brushes a little more than it should have done. You have only one defect as an artist, but it is a capital offence, and you will not outgrow it—you are *never natural*!'

He was silent from vexation.

He had an exaggerated opinion of his own genius, and saw in himself a mingling of Clouet and Boucher, Leonardo and Largillière, and was often restless and nervous under his sense of her depreciative criticism; but he was very proud of the intimacy he was allowed to enjoy with her, and usually bore her chastisement with a spaniel's humility; a quality rare in him, spoilt and courted darling of high dames as he was.

'If you do take a portrait of that child,'

she pursued, pointing to the distant boat, 'you will be utterly unable to portray her as she is; you will never give the sea-stains on her gown, the sea-tan on her face, the rough dull red of that old worn sea-cap. You will idealise her, which with you means that you will make her utterly artificial. She will become a goddess of liberty, and she will look like a maid of honour frisking under a republican disguise to amuse a frisky Court. The simple sea-born creature yonder, rowing through blue water, and thinking of the sale of her oranges or the capture of her fish, will be altogether and forever beyond you. It is always beyond the Lelys and the Bouchers, though it would not have been beyond Van-dyke. Do you think you could paint a forest-tree or a field-flower? Not you; your daisy would become a gardenia, and your larch would be a lime on the boulevards.'

'Am I to understand, Madame, that you have suddenly become a patroness of nature? Then surely even I, poor creature of the boulevards though I be, need not despair of becoming *natürlich*?'

'You mistake,' said Nadine with a little

sadness. 'I have lived in a hothouse, but I have always envied those who lived in the open air. Besides, I am not an artist; I am a mere *mondaine*. I was born in the world as an oyster is in its shallows. But an artist, if he be worthy the name, should abhor the world. He should live and work and think and dream in the open air, and in full contact with nature. Do you suppose Millet could have breathed an hour in your studio with its velvets and tapestries and lacquer work, with its draperies and screens and rugs, and carefully shaded windows? He would have been stifled. Why is nearly all modern work so valueless? Because it is nearly all of it studio-work; work done at high pressure and in an artificial light. Do you think that Michel Angelo could have endured to dwell in Cromwell Road? Or do you think that Murillo or Domenichino would have built themselves an hotel in the Avenue Villiers? Why is Basil Vereschaguin, with all his faults and deformities, original and in a way sublime? Because he works in the open air; in no light tempered otherwise than by the clouds as they pass, or by the leaves as they move.'

‘For heaven’s sake!’ cried Loswa with a gesture of appeal.

She laughed a little.

‘Ah, my poor Court poodle, with your pretty tricks and graces!—of course, the very name of our wolf of the forests is terrible to you. But I suppose the Court has made the poodle what he is; I suppose it is as much your duchesses’ fault as your own.’

Then she turned away and left this favourite of fortune and great ladies to his own reflections. They were irritated and mortified; bitter with that bitterest of all earthly things, wounded vanity.

Good heavens! he thought, with a sharp stinging sense of a woman’s base ingratitude, was it for this that he had painted her portrait in such wise that season after season each succeeding one had been the centre of all eyes in the Paris Salon? Was it for this that he had immortalised her face looking out from a cloud of shadow like a narcissus in the mists of March?—that he had drawn her in every attitude and every costume, from the loose white draperies of her hours of languor to the golden tissues and crowding jewels of her court-dress

at imperial palaces? Was it for this that he had composed that divinest portrait of them all, in which, with a knot of stephanotis at her breast and a collar of pearls at her throat, she seemed to smile at all who looked on her that slight, amused, disdainful smile which had killed men as surely as any silver-hilted dagger lying in an ivory case, which once was steeped in *aqua Tofana* for Lucrezia or Bianca? Was it for this!—to be called opprobrious, derisive names, and have Basil Vereschaguin, the painter of death, of carnage, of horror, of brown Hindoos and hideous Tartars, vaunted before him as his master!

He hated Vereschaguin as a Sèvres vase, had it a mind and soul to hate, might hate the bronze statue of a gladiator; and his tormentor, in a moment of mercilessness and candour, had wounded him with a weapon whose use he never forgave.

‘He is a coxcomb! Béthune is quite right,’ she said of him when Melville hinted that she had been too cruel. ‘He has marvellous talent and *technique*, but he dares to think that these two are genius. If he had not likened himself to Vandyke I might perhaps never have told him

what I think of his place in art. He is a pretty painter, a very pretty painter, and his portraits of me are charming; but if they be looked at at all in the twentieth century they will hardly rank higher than we rank now the pastels of Rosalba; certainly not higher than we rank the portraits of Greuze.'

'If I were a painter I would be content to be Greuze,' said Melville with a smile.

'No you would not,' said Nadine; 'you would not be content to be a d'Estrées in your own profession, nor any other mere Court cardinal.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE following morning Loris Loswa rose much earlier than his wont, and went out of the gilded gate of the pretty little villa which he had taken for the season at St. Raphael ; a co-quettish place with large gardens and trellised paths overhung with creepers ; and down below, a small cutter ready for use in a nook of the bay where the aloes and the mimosa grew thickest. It all belonged to a friend of his, who was away in distant lands to escape his creditors, and by whose misfortunes Loswa had profited with that easy egotism which had been so advantageous to him throughout his life, and which looked so goodnatured that no one resented it. He descended this morning to the shore by the winding cactus-lined path which led down to it, and asked the sailors if they knew of an island called Bonaventure.

They knew nothing about it; they, however, consulted the admiralty maps and found it: a tiny dot some leagues to the south-westward.

A fisherman who was on the beach at the time told him more. He knew the island, everybody knew it; but nobody ever was allowed to land there; its owner was an odd man, morose and suspicious; the demoiselle was good and kind; the islet belonged to Jean Bérarde, who owned every inch of it. He would leave it to the girl of course. It was small, but of very considerable profit. Loswa listened with impatience, and told his skipper to make for the isle as fast as he could. He himself knew nothing of the sea, and hated it; but he was *piqué au jeu*. Melville had almost forbidden him to go thither, and the great lady who had ridiculed him had doubted his power to paint the picture of a peasant-girl. The irritation of antagonism had aroused all the obstinacy and all the capricious self-will of an undisciplined and vain nature.

‘To Bonaventure!’ he said with triumph, as in the glad and cloudless morning air his little vessel danced over the waves, the great seagulls wheeling and screaming in her wake.

There were a buoyant sea and a favouring breeze.

Loswa detested both sea and country, and was never at heart content off the asphalte of the boulevards. But since it would have looked very vulgar to spend his whole winter in Paris, he selected the south coast usually for the colder months, because the world went with him there, because he saw so many faces that were familiar, and because on this shore so thickly set with châteaux and villas, so artificially adorned, so trimmed, and trained, and levelled, and planted by architect and landscape gardener, it was possible for him to forget that he was not in Paris; the very sea itself, so blue, so tranquil, so idly basking in broad light and luminous horizons, seemed like the painted sea of an operetta by Lecocq.

Besides, though he had no pleasure in rural or maritime things, found no joy in solitude and no consolation in nature for the loss of the movement of the world, he could not have been the fine colourist he was without possessing a fine sense of colour, and the power to appreciate beautiful lines, and all the changeful effects of light and shade. He did not see

Nature as Millet or Corot saw it, but as Lancret or Coypel saw it. It was only a background for a nymph or a goddess to him as to them ; but he was not insensible to the forms which made up that background : the sunlit vapour, the blue mountain, the golden woodland, or the shadowy lake.

The sea was full of life : market-boats, fishing-boats, skiffs of all kinds, with striped curved lateen sails, were crossing each other on it. There were a few yachts, French, English, American, at anchor in the bays, in waiting for the cup-races ; there were some merchant-ships afar off, brown-canvased brigs bearing in from Genoa or Ajaccio, and the ugly black smoke of a big steamer here and there defaced the marvellous blue and rose of the air at the birth of day. The sea was buoyant but not rough, his light cutter flew airily as a curlew over the azure plain. There were mists to the southward, lovely white mists, airy and suggestive as the veil of a bride, but they floated away before the sun, so rapidly as the day grew on, that the bold indented lines of Corsica became visible, bathed in a rosy and golden warmth. He had enough soul in him to feel the beauty of the

morning though he had been playing baccarat at the club till an hour or two previously; to be conscious of the charm of this full clear sunrise which bathed the world of waters in its radiance, of the silver-shining wings of the white gulls dipping in the hollow of the wave, of the grandeur of the land as he looked back at it with its semicircles of snow-capped hills towering to the skies. But he would not have cared for them had there been no human interest beside them.

After sailing steadily some two hours or so they sighted, and in another two hours neared; a little island which was certainly the one marked on the French chart as Bonaventure, lying all alone far out to the south-west. Loswa did not need the positive assertion of his crew to tell him that he had arrived at his desired goal. It was small, conical-shaped, high, and steep, with a broad reef of sand to the northward. It rose aloft in the air, grey with olives, green with orange-trees. No habitation was visible upon it; but on the sand there was drawn up high and dry an old boat with a sail of Venetian red stained brown by wear and tear.

The island had evidently been made fruitful at the cost of many centuries of labour; the natural rock of it was terraced with many ridges rising one above another, each planted with productive trees; the soil had no doubt been carried up load by load with infinite trouble; but the effect of the whole was luxuriant and picturesque, as the conelike mass of verdure, here silver-grey and there emerald green, towered upward in the thin sun-pierced vapours of the early day.

The soundings showed deep water almost up to the rock itself.

‘I am going to sketch,’ said Loswa to his skipper as he pointed to the level strip of sand. ‘Let me land there.’

Their assertions that no one ever did land there he disregarded. A small boat was rowed up to the strip of beach, and he got out, bidding his sailors wait round the edge of a jutting rock, which would give them shade as the day should advance.

He glanced at the old red coble drawn up on the shore. It was the same he had seen three days before; he felt sure of it by its colour and its build.

He looked about him and around him for a means of ascent, and saw a zigzag path that wound up through the hanging orchards of olive, of lemon, and of orange, and higher still the rope-ladder called *passerelle*, so often used in the Riviera to climb steep rocks. The air was full of the intense perfume of the trees, which were starred all over with their white blossoms. He thought of Sicily, where you have to shut your door against the fragrance of the fields in spring, lest you should faint and sleep for ever from their fragrance.

The path and the *passerelle* would certainly, he reasoned, lead up to any house there might be at the summit. He slung his sketching things over his shoulder and began to mount the crooked rocky road of moss-grown stone with cyclamen growing in its crevices, and the rose-hued flowers of the leafless cereus springing up here and there.

But he was not allowed to ascend unchallenged; high above him there was a rustling sound, then a deep angry growl, and in a moment or two a great white Pyrenean dog showed himself, stared down at him with frank hostility, and bounded headlong from

ridge to ridge underneath the boughs, with full intent to reach him and devour him. But a voice called aloud : 'Tò, tò, Clovis?' and Loswa smiled. He knew he had succeeded.

Through the labyrinth of branches, springing after the dog, came the girl who had thrown back the gold bracelet to the lady of St. Pharamond.

'The dog will not hurt you whilst I am here,' she called out to him. 'But he might kill you if I were not. Do you want my grandfather? Why have you landed here? It is private ground. He has gone to Grasse for two days to see an oil merchant.'

Loswa felt that he could not have timed his visit more felicitously.

'Good heavens! what a handsome child,' he thought, as he bowed to her with his easy grace and that eloquent glance which had power to stir the most languid pulses of his patrician sitters.

'I landed in hopes that I might be allowed to paint the view from this exquisite little spot,' he said with well-acted hesitation in his manner. 'A friend of mine, who is, I think, a friend of yours too, a priest of the name of

Melville, has spoken to me so often of the beauty of your island.'

Standing above him, holding the big dog by the collar, she smiled at the name of Melville, and came a few steps nearer with more confidence. She never for a moment doubted the entire truth of what he said.

Her blue-and-brown-striped linen gown was but a wisp; it had been drenched through in its time with sea-water, and had the stains of grasses, and dews, and sands, and fruits upon it; it was bound round her waist by a leathern belt, and its short sleeves were pulled up to the shoulder, as they had been the day before. But no artist would have wished for a better dress, and even a sculptor would not have desired to remove it from the limbs that it clung to so closely that it hid nothing of their perfect shape and the curves of the throat and breast that had the indecision and softness of childhood with the fulness of feminine growth. Her hair was tucked away under a red fisher-cap, a veritable *bonnet rouge*; and her large brilliant eyes, of an indescribable colour, were shining, as if the sun was imprisoned in them, under level, dark delicate eyebrows. Her

skin was fair, her hair auburn. He thought he had seen nothing so perfectly lovely in all his life : it was a living Titian, a virgin Giorgione.

‘Anyone who knows Monsignor Melville is welcome to Bonaventure,’ she said frankly. ‘It is a pity my grandfather is away. He does not like strangers, but a friend of Monsignor’s would not seem so to him. No one has ever been here to paint anything before. What is it you want to paint—the house?’

Loswa knew that he had done a dishonourable thing, and a mean one, in using Melville’s name as a passport to a place where Melville would never have allowed him to go had he known it; but, like everyone else, having begun on a wrong course he went on in it. He had succeeded so well at the commencement that he would not listen to that delicacy of good breeding which represented conscience to him.

‘Do not be afraid of Clovis. He will not hurt you now he sees that I speak to you; he is so sensible. Will you come now or another day?’ she asked him with the frankness of a boy.

‘We have a Latin poet who tells us that to-

day alone is our own,' said Loswa with a smile. 'I will come now at once, and most gladly. Clovis is a grand dog and a good guard for his young mistress,' he added ; thinking to himself, 'how lovely she is, and she knows it no more than if she were a sea anemone on the shore ; and she looks at me and speaks to me with no more embarrassment than if I were but the wooden figure of a ship !'

'I will come up most gladly,' he said again, with more ardour than he showed in a duchess's drawing-rooms. 'It is so very kind of you. I am sure the view from the summit must be magnificent. I fear though,' he added, with hypocritical modesty, 'that it will be beyond my powers.'

'I hope not. I shall like to see anyone paint,' she said with cordiality ; and added, a little ashamed, 'I have never seen anyone paint ; I have heard of such a thing of course, and there are the pictures in the churches and chapels which one knows were painted by men ; but I have no idea of how it is done.'

'You should have been shown by Raphael himself,' said Loswa.

'Raphael?' she echoed. 'Oh no, he s

our fruit-packer ; he would not know how to do it any better than I do,' she said as she turned and began to ascend to show him the way.

'Can you climb?' she added, looking at him doubtfully. 'I mean climb where it is like a stone wall?'

She had taken him under her protection and into her favour, but he felt that he would have preferred to this frank innocent friendliness a certain hesitation and embarrassment such as would have indicated a different kind of sentiment as possible. She was as kind to him, as simple and frank and candid with him, as if he were any old fisherman that she had known from her birth. It was not what he desired, yet it had a certain charm ; it was so childlike, so honest, so free from all affectation or self-consciousness, or lurking suspicion or intention of any sort.

'Clovis is so good,' she pursued, all unconscious of his reflections. 'His wife (she is called Brunehildt) had four puppies yesterday. Two were drowned ; it was such a pity ! I am going to give one of the two left to Monsignor ; he is always fond of dogs. Take care how

you come up, it is very steep ; for me I am used to it. I run up and down a dozen times a day ; but a person not used to it may slip.'

It was, indeed, steep, and often there were ledges of rock in the way which had to be jumped over or scrambled over in any handiest fashion, whilst on others the perpendicular face of the cliff could only be ascended by the rope-ladder so often in use in the Riviera ; but Loswa, in an indolent way, was athletic ; he had in his youth been skilled in gymnastic exercises, and though now enervated by his life in cities, he kept apace with her, and soon had gained the level summit of the island, a broad green tableland planted with olives and oranges, with here and there a great stone pine, relic of the wild pine woods which, before the *petite culture* had stepped thither with axe and spade, had clothed doubtless the whole of Bonaventure down to the water's edge.

There was some ground planted with cabbages and artichokes, some place where maize would be planted later in the season, but the chief of the land was orchard ; and in the midst of it stood a long, low whitewashed house, with pink shutters and a tiled roof.

‘Now look!’ she said, with a little pride in her voice as she stretched her hand out to the northward view.

Everywhere far below them, stretching out to infinite indefinite horizons, was the blue sea studded with various sails; and the beautiful coast stretched likewise away into endless realms of sparkling light; the range of the mountains rose blue and snow-crowned behind that fairy shore; and this enchanted paradise was always there to call men’s thoughts to nature, and they in it only thought of the hell of the punters, the caress of the *cocotte*, the shining gold rolling in under the croupier’s rake!

Familiar as he was with this sea and land, he could not restrain an exclamation of wondering admiration.

‘No wonder you have become the beautiful thing you are, looking on all that beauty from your birth!’ he said in an impulse of frank admiration, mingled with his habitual language of flattery.

The girl laughed.

‘Do you think I am beautiful? Everybody always says that. But grandfather grumbles; he says it is the devil’s gift. Myself, I do not

know; the flowers are beautiful, but I do not think that human beings are so.'

'And you have grown up like a flower——'

'How did you know about me?' she interrupted him. 'Did Monsignor Melville speak so much of me? He was with my uncle in his last illness, you know, and whenever he is on this coast he comes to us. You like the view?' she continued with satisfaction and a sense of possession of it. 'Yes; it is good to see, is it not? But I am happier when I am down on the shore.'

'Indeed! Why?'

'Because there one only wants to swim, and here one wants to fly. Now, one does swim; one cannot fly.'

'To covet the impossible is the only divine thing in man,' said he with a smile. 'It is just because we have that longing to fly that we may hope we are made to do something more than walk.'

'Do you mean that discontent is good?' she said with surprise.

'In a certain measure, perhaps.'

'Content is better,' she said sturdily.

'I hope you will always be blessed with it.'

It is like a swallow, it brings peace where it rests,' said her guest with a little sigh ; and he thought : ' My lady yonder is never content ; it is the penalty of culture. Will this child be so always in her ignorance ? Will she marry the skipper of a merchant-ship or the owner of an olive-yard, and live happily ever afterwards, with a tribe of little brown-eyed children that will run out into the road with flowers for the carriages ? I suppose so ; why not ? Melville said in her little way she was an heiress. Of course, all the louts that own a fishing-coble or an acre of orange-trees will be eager to annex her and her island.'

She was walking by his side under the gnarled olives which had been stripped a month before of their black berries. She was looking at him frankly, curiously, with doubtful glances.

' I am afraid you are of the *noblesse*,' she said, abruptly stopping short within a yard of the house.

' What makes you think that ?' he said, aware that he received the prettiest of indirect compliments which a much flattered life had ever given him.

' You look like it,' she answered. ' You

have an air about you, and your linen is so fine, and your voice is soft and slow. It is only the noble people who have that kind of music in their voices.'

'I wish I were a peasant if it would please you better,' he said gallantly.

She answered very literally :

'That is nonsense. You cannot wish such a thing ; no one ever wishes to go down. And, for myself, I do not mind ; it is my grandfather who hates the aristocrats.'

'So I have heard,' said Loswa. 'But he is out to-day, you say. Will you not let me sketch this superb view?'

'Yes, if you like. I never saw anyone paint, as I told you ; I shall be glad to see it. But will you not come in and eat and drink something first ? I have heard that the nobles, when they are not dressing and dancing, are always eating and drinking.'

'Nothing more cruel was ever said of them by all their satirists,' answered Loswa. 'It will be very kind indeed if you will give me a glass of water ; I need nothing else.'

'You shall have some of Catherine's cakes,' said the girl, 'and some coffee and a fresh egg.'

Catherine—she is our servant—makes beautiful cakes when she is not cross. Why are people who are old so often cross? Is it the trouble of living so long that makes them so? If it be that, I would rather die young. I think one ought to be like the olive-trees; the older they are the better fruit they bear.'

Then she called aloud, 'Catherine! Catherine! here is a stranger who wants some breakfast,' and ran across the bit of rough grass before the house, where cocks and hens, pigeons and rabbits, a tethered ass and a pet kid, were enjoying the fine morning together in harmony.

An old woman in a white cap showed herself for a moment in the doorway, grumbled inarticulately, and disappeared.

'She is gone to get it,' said Damaris. 'She is very cross, as I tell you, but she is very good for all that. I have known her all my life. Her honey is the best in the country. She always prays for the bees. My grandfather does not know it, but when it is swarming time she says a paternoster over each hive, and the honey comes so yellow, so smooth, so fine; its taste is like the smell of thyme. Come

through the house to my terrace ; you shall have your breakfast there.'

He followed her through the house, an ugly, whitewashed place, with nothing of grace or colour about it, though cleaner than most such dwellings are upon the mainland ; it smelt sweetly, too, from the flood of fragrant, orange-scented air which poured through past its open doors, and the odour from the bales of packed oranges which were stored in its passages and lumber-rooms, awaiting transport to the beach below. In the guest-chamber there was some old oaken furniture of which he recognised the age and value, and some chairs of *repoussé* leather, which would have fetched a high price ; but it was all dreary, dull, stiff, and the figure of the girl, with her brilliant, luminous beauty, and her vividly-coloured clothes, looked like a pomegranate flaming in a dusky cellar.

'Come out here,' she said to him, and led him out on to a little terrace.

It was whitewashed, like all the stone of the house, but it was gay and bright. Its gallery was covered with a Canadian vine still red ; it seemed to hang above the sea, so steeply did that side of the island slope down.

ward beneath it ; it had some cane chairs in it and a little marble table, a red-striped awning was stretched above it.

‘This is all mine,’ she said, with pride. ‘You shall eat here. Take that long chair : it came off one of the great ships that go the voyages to India ; the mate of the ship gave it me. I made that awning myself out of a sail. I bring my books here and read. Sometimes I sit here half the night instead of going to bed—that is, when the nightingales are singing in the orange-trees. My grandfather will always have the house-door shut and bolted by eight o’clock, even in summer. So I come here ; it seems such folly to go to bed in the short nights, they are as bright as day. The time to sleep then is noon. You rest, and I will go and bring Catherine, and your breakfast.’

He caught her hand as she was about to go away.

‘Pray, stay,’ he murmured. ‘It is to hear you talk that I care ; I want nothing else, not even that glass of water ; I only made it an excuse to come into your house.’

She drew her hand from him and frowned a little.

‘ Why should you make an excuse? If you had said you wished to come I would have let you ; if you do not want to eat there is nothing to come for ; I am never indoors except to eat, or if it rain very heavily.’

Then she went, and he dared not detain her lest he should alarm her. She seemed to him like a bird which alights near a stranger so long as there is no movement, but at a single sound takes flight. Left alone he sat still in the chair she had assigned to him, and gazed over the sea ; there was nothing except sea visible from this little terrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN a little while she returned, bearing in her strong grasp an old silver tray, with coffee, cream and sugar in old silver pots.

The servant followed her, cross, wrinkled and suspicious, carrying bread and honey and oranges, and a pile of sweet flat cakes. Damaris set down her tray on the marble table.

‘We have a few things like this,’ she said, touching the old silver. ‘We were noble, too, once, very very long ago, they say; but my grandfather does not believe it. I like to believe it. It may be nonsense, but one likes to fancy that ever, ever so long ago one’s forefathers were fighting men, not labourers; it seems to make one ready to fight too. It must make a difference, I think, in oneself whether they were soldiers or slaves. Not, you know,’ she added, after a moment’s

pause, 'that I do not think *la petite culture* the happiest life in the world ; but the labourer is narrow, mean, horribly fond of money, and very rough to his women, and I suppose the poor were still worse in that distant time.'

She poured him out his coffee as she spoke, and filled up the cup with foaming milk, and pressed on him the rolls, the cakes, the honey. The china was the heavy earthenware which rustic people use, and did not suit the old silver of the tray and of the vessels ; but Loswa, for once, was not critical ; he thought he had never tasted anything more delicious than was this island fare.

Damaris, having served him, ate and drank herself, sitting on a wooden stool beside the balustrade covered with the red-dened creeper. She did not want anything, but not to break bread with a guest seemed to her bad manners. She had pulled her sleeves down and put on shoes and stockings. She had thrown aside her woollen cap ; her silky, golden curls shone in the sun ; her eyes looked at him with honest inquisitiveness and astonishment. Suddenly she said aloud :

'Ah ! I remember now ! It was you who

were with that lady yesterday when she threw me the gold bracelet over the wall.'

Loswa assented, but he would have preferred to forget his friend at that moment, being uneasily conscious of the contempt with which his present position on this terrace would be regarded by her did she ever know of it.

'Did she take me for a beggar?' said Damaris, with anger glistening under her long lashes.

'Oh no, she only wished to please you—to surprise you. You see, she could not tell who you were.'

The girl's cheeks grew a deeper rose.

'That is true,' she said, with her first touch of embarrassment; 'I was rowing, and one cannot row in fine clothes. Perhaps, if she saw me at Mass——'

'If she saw you now!' said he, with a glance of meaning thrown away upon her. 'Remember, she hardly saw you at all; only an old boat, a pile of oranges, a ragged sail——'

'My sail is very shabby,' said Damaris with shame. 'I took the new one to make this awning, and my grandfather was angry and would not let me have another. Who is that

lady? She looked very pretty. Is she your wife?’

‘She is the Countess Othmar.’

‘The Countess Othmar!’ she repeated in a little awe. Even she in her solitude had heard that name of power. The narrative was very vague to her; she had never known more than the bare outline of it, but she remembered, when she was a child sitting amongst the daffodils and plucking them on the grass before the house on Bonaventure one evening in the springtime, hearing Catherine, who had been with a load of fruit to the mainland, cry aloud to Raphael :

‘Holy Virgin, what think you? The *petiote* of Nicole, the wife of Othmar, is dead!’

And the child, pausing with the daffodils lying in tumbled gold upon her lap, had listened and heard all that was known of that early death, which only the swallows had witnessed and the blind house-dog had mourned. She had always remembered it, and often, when she had seen the daffodils yellow in the grass of March, had thought of it again, and her imagination had been busy with it, creating bodily forms for the people

of whom she knew naught but the names. Therefore, when the word 'Othmar' fell now upon her ear, it moved her with a certain thrill, almost as of personal pain.

'You have heard of her?' said Loswa.

'Not of her,' said Damaris gravely; 'of the one who died—who killed herself, they say, because he loved another woman.'

'Bah!' said Loswa, with the light contempt for all such tragic follies which the boulevardier always affects, even when he does not feel it.

'They said so,' repeated Damaris, with her eyes very large and serious.

'Do you like this lady very much?' she asked, after a pause.

'She is a charming person; yes.'

'Is she a very great lady? Does she reign over anything?'

'Over everyone she approaches, if she can,' said he with some impatience; 'and nearly always she can, for she is a person of very strong will, and influences others more than she knows or they know.'

'And what does she do when she has influenced them? Monsignor says that to possess

influence is to have the ten talents, and that we shall have to account for the use of every one of them.'

'That is just the chief mischief,' said Loswa, glomily thinking of himself, not of his auditor. 'It is the getting the influence that amuses her; that she cares about. When once she has got it you are nothing at all to her; no more than a glove she has worn.'

'She must be a very cruel woman,' said Damaris. .

'Oh no,' he protested, with a sudden sense of his disloyalty, 'she is not cruel at all, she is only indifferent.'

'Indifferent? That is to neither like nor dislike? I do not understand how one can be like that. One must either have good weather or bad; one must either love or hate.'

'She does neither,' said he with a sigh; then, with a sense that it was altogether wrong to blame a great lady and a countrywoman of his own to a little country' girl whom he had never seen before, he changed the subject abruptly.

'Are you not very dull on your island? It is a long way off the mainland.'

‘Dull? Oh, people must be very stupid who are ever dull. There is always so much to do out among the fruit-trees or down by the beach. The days are always too short for me.’

‘That is the charm of being fifteen. Are you always on this island? Do you never go to Nice?’

‘I have never seen Nice. I did want to see the Carnival last year, but my grandfather would not hear of it. It was Raphael told me about it. It must have been very fine; but, of course, we have nothing to do with the mainland, that is only for the rich idle people. I hear they sleep all the day and buzz about all the night, like moths or like bats. What a strange life it must be!’

Loswa thought of the great gaslit glittering Salle des Jeux which was not more than a dozen leagues off this primitive orange-island.

‘You are happier here, in the middle of your blue water, putting out your oil lamps as the moon rises,’ he replied. ‘Chateaubriand might have lived on Bonaventure. Who would have believed there was anything so solitary and so innocent as this within a few hours’ sail of the Blanc paradise?’

‘What is that?’ said Damaris, who, although she could see afar off the palms and domes of Monte Carlo gleaming in the sun on the northward horizon every time she sailed that way, was as profoundly ignorant of the *tripot* and its works as if Bonaventure had been in the Pacific.

‘I have heard,’ she continued, ‘that there are very strange things and people over there, that it is a feast-day every day with them, and all their life like a fair. My grandfather always says he would shoot them all down as they shot the hostages in the Commune, but I do not think that would be right. If they are silly, one should pity them.’

‘They are silly indeed, and I fear your sweet pity would not avail to save them. The feast-day is a sorry affair at its close.’

‘Oh, I know. I have seen Raphael come home drunk and beat Jacqueline (that is his wife) because she cried; and he is as good as gold when he is sober, and as gentle as a sheep when there is no drink.’

‘In some way we all drink, we unfortunates,’ said Loswa; then, seeing her look of surprise, he added, ‘I did not speak literally, my dear;

your Raphael's drink is a *petit vin bleu*, and ours is a costly thing we call Pleasure, but it comes to the same result; only, I suppose, Raphael has some five or six days in the week that he is good for work, and we cannot say as much as that. We are all the week round at the fair.'

She ruffled her pretty loose short locks that hung over her forehead, and her brilliant eyes looked at him perplexedly.

'I am glad I live on the island,' she said as the issue of her perplexity.

'And I too am glad you do,' said he, with more sincerity than he usually put into his pretty speeches.

He felt that before he approached the great object of his voyage he must justify his pretences and win her confidence by painting something which would please her fancy. To his facility of touch it was easy and rapid work to sketch on his block of paper the sea view, the terrace wall, the interior of the sitting-room, the old chairs, and the silver tankards. Sheet after sheet was filled and cut off and sent fluttering into her eager hands. To her it seemed the work of magic. Just a little

water and a few pans of colour could make all the sea and sky, all the plants and stones, all the pots and pans and household things, seem real again on fragments of paper ! She did not heed or even know that he was a man young and handsome, whose eyes spoke a bold and amorous language ; she was absorbed in his creations ; he seemed to her the most marvellous of sorcerers. With delighted cries of recognition she welcomed the likeness of all the places and the objects so familiar to her ; she was filled with a rapture of childish ecstasy. She hung over his work and watched him with a wonder which was only not awe, because it was such frank and childish delight.

Whilst he sketched, he let her talk at her will, in her own fashion, putting a few careless questions now and then. She was by nature gay and communicative ; the seclusion and severity of her rearing had not extinguished the natural buoyancy and originality of her temper, and it was a pleasure to her to have anyone to speak to of other things than the land labours and the household work.

In a few brief phrases she had described to him all her short simple life ; how her mother

had died at her birth, they said, and her father when she had been eight years old ; how she had never been baptised ' or anything,' until, to please Melville, her grandsire had allowed her to enter the Church's fold like a little stray sheep ; how she had been brought up by old Catherine, and taught to read by her, and how she had managed to read all the books her mother had left : Corneille, Racine, Lamartine, Lamotte, Fouquet, La Fontaine, and knew them almost all by heart, for she had no new ones ; she told him all about the culture of the olive and the various kinds of oranges, and all the different methods of pruning, tending, packing them ; the big fragrant golden balls were much nearer to her heart than the black oily olives, but she was learned about both ; she told him also all about the poor people she knew on the coast, of the young men whom the conscription had taken just as they were of use to their people, of the old women who took the flowers into the towns, of the children who could swim and dive like little fish, and were her playmates when she had time to play ; the boat-builders, the fisher-folk, the flower-sellers, the toilers of the working world of

whom all the fashionable world that flocks to the Riviera knows nothing, unless it throws them a few pence in the dust of the road, or thinks they form a pretty point of colour against the white walls and the flower-filled grass, or bids them make a *bouillabaisse* for a picnic in some little wooden cabin high up upon the red rocks, amongst the cactus spikes and the sea-pinks.

All this simple talk interested Loswa as it would never have done had not the mouth which uttered it been as lovely to look at as a half-opened damask rose.

‘How came Monsignor Melville to speak of me to you?’ she asked once with a persistency which was a strong trait of her character.

‘He recognised you,’ he answered her. ‘He told us that you were prouder than any princess of them all, and that where we had meant but a joke you had, very naturally, seen an affront. He is much attached to you I am sure, and felt quite as angry as you were.’

‘I was very angry,’ she said passionately, with the colour hot in her cheeks. ‘I thought the lady took me for a beggar. When one goes in a boat one cannot be *endimanchée*. I

was taking the oranges to the Petite Afrique ; there is a little old woman who keeps a little old shop there, and has nothing but what she makes by the sale of the fruit people give her. There are three trees here that are my own ; my father planted them when he was home from a voyage, and to all their fruit I have a right. Grandfather lets me sell it or give it away.'

' And I am sure you do always the latter ? '

' Oh, not quite always. Sometimes I want money for something, and then I sell the oranges ; but it is only if there be a wreck, or a boat lost at sea, or a death or a birth. Of course I want nothing for myself ; grandfather does not let me want, but he is not fond of giving to others, he likes to keep money locked up, and see it grow slowly bit upon bit like the coral. Do you like that ? Myself, I think there is no pleasure at all in money except to give it away.'

' But whom do you give it to ? You are all alone on your island.'

' There are the people who work for us ; and then I know so many on the coast. I have come and gone between this and the mainland so many many times, ever since I was a baby.

It is such a good life being on the sea ; so long as I have the water I never want anything else. Some of them call me *la mouette*.'

'It is the best of all lives. I am much on the sea myself,' said her companion, who hated the sea.

'You have a boat then?'

'I have a yacht ; yes.'

'All to yourself?'

'Yes ; to go about in as I fancy. I shall be delighted if you will sail in it some day.'

'Ah ! it is a pleasure-ship then ? I see those little ships racing often ; they are beautiful. You must be very rich to have one all to yourself, not trading anywhere, or even dredging. How much money have you ? And how do you keep it ? In boxes, in coffers ? Some of my grandfather's is down the well ; he took bricks out of the side of the well, put the money in the hole, and then put back the bricks again. He did it at night ; no one knows it but me. Do you keep your money like that ?'

'No ; in our world we give it to other men to take care of for us.'

'That seems very stupid. Why not take care of your own ?'

She was sitting on the parapet of the terrace, her feet hung down; she leaned one hand on the stone she sat on; behind her was the broad blue of the sky, and about her all the shining of the effulgent light. She looked like a rhododendron flower growing up into the sunshine out of a corner of a dusky old garden.

‘You have not told me how much money you have,’ she pursued. ‘If you let other folks take care of it for you, it is no wonder that you gentle people come to poverty so often.’

‘We have too many caretakers, no doubt,’ said Loswa, ‘and they feather their own nests. But I am not a very rich man; pray do not think I am. I am only an artist. Nobody is rich now except the Jews here, and the rogues across the Atlantic. Would you let me make a sketch of yourself just as you sit now? It would be charming.’

‘Will you give it to that lady?’

‘No, on my honour. I will give it to you and make a copy for myself.’

‘Well, if you like; but would it not be better if I put on my Sunday frock?’

‘Not for worlds. Sunday frocks have no affinity with art, my dear; yours is, no doubt, a very pretty one, but I should prefer to make your portrait as I have seen you first.’

‘Oh, I do not mind; only this gown is very shabby and old. I am grown too big for it. I am always growing. Monsignor says that if I grew in grace as I do in centimètres I should soon be a saint like our St. Veronica.’

‘It is not for me to disparage the saints,’ said Loswa, ‘but I think you will have another mission in this life than to be of their community. Keep still a little while; I will not detain you long. So!—that is just right. I wish I were Raffaele and Leonardo in one, to be worthier of the occasion.’

‘Who are they?’ said Damaris, as he set his folding easel straight before him and began to sketch in the flowerlike figure on the wall, fresh and wholesome as the sea-lavender that grew in the sand below. He who was all his life in a hothouse recognised the value and fragrance of that sea-born plant, though it was too homely and simple for him; recognised it with his mind, though not with his soul.

The girl knew nothing of all that made up

the world to him ; the names most common to him in modern literature and art were to her dead letters that said nothing ; the allusions familiar to him would have been to her phrases without meaning ; all that constitutes modern culture was to her as an unknown country, and the only whisper she had ever heard of all that poets and artists tell the world was what she had felt rather than understood of the read and re-read pages of 'Athalie,' and of 'Attila,' of 'Cinna,' and of 'Sintram.' Yet there was a certain richness, as of virgin soil, in that absolute freedom from conventional education, and from received ideas ; she expressed herself with simplicity and vigour, and this unworn, untrained mind, only nurtured on the high thoughts of great poets, had escaped all the bondage of tradition and of secondhand knowledge, and remained what it had been made by nature.

It required a higher intelligence than Loswa's was wholly to appreciate this charm ; he was too conventional to be greatly attracted by unconventional things ; he was too used to all the artificial attractions of artificial women, and too artificial himself, to enjoy and admire

all this freshness of fancy. It would have needed a poet to have done so, and he had nothing of the poet in him. But he was enough of a student of human nature to understand that with which he scarcely sympathised, and she was so handsome that her physical beauty created in him a compassion for the solitude in which it dwelt, such compassion as her intellectual solitude, and her half-unconscious longing for wider worlds than her own, would have failed to awaken.

‘Is it possible that all that is to go to a *gros bourgeois* who builds boats?’ he thought, as he looked at the beautiful lines of her features and her form, and that fairness of her skin just warmed by sun and air into the bloom as of a peach, which he strove in vain to reproduce to his own satisfaction in his drawing. A face that would turn all Paris after it like sunflowers after the sun, to be left to pass from the glow of youth to the greyness of age on a little island in mid-sea! It seemed impossible—it would become impossible if she once learned her own charms.

‘Your isle is worthy of Paul and Virginia,’ he said to her, speaking to her in the phrase

that she could understand, for she knew every line of Bernardin de St.-Pierre. 'But where is Paul? Is there no Paul?'

'No, there is nobody at all like Paul,' she answered, with a little laugh at the idea. 'The youngest man is Raphael, and he has a fat wife and five children. They live down on the other side of the cliffs.'

'But Paul will come,' said Loswa. 'He always comes. Would you let me substitute myself for him?' he added with that somewhat impertinent audacity which had made his success so great amongst women of the world.

It did not please Damaris. Her brows drew together in that instantaneous and tempestuous anger which her face had expressed as the bracelet had fallen on her lap.

'You are not at all like Paul,' she said a little contemptuously. 'You are not young enough, and you have wrinkles about your eyes.'

Loswa reddened with irritation. He was still young, but life in the world ages fast, and he was conscious that to this child, in the first flush and sunrise of her earliest girlhood, he might well seem old.

'You are cruel,' he said humbly, 'and I am

unhappy; I can only envy the Paul of the future.'

'Oh,' said Damaris very tranquilly, 'I know all about my future. I am to marry my cousin, Louis Roze; he has a *chantier* at St. Tropez; he is quite rich; he is very ugly and stout; he builds boats and barques; myself, I would sooner sail in them.'

She said all the sentences in the same even voice; marriage seemed to her to be hardly of as much interest as the boats.

'Good heavens!' said Loswa involuntarily. 'Athene to a Satyr!'

He could imagine the shipwright of St. Tropez without much effort of imagination: a black-browed son of the soil, smoking a short pipe, supping up prawn-soup noisily on feast-days; a Socialist, no doubt, and an argumentative politician when he had drunk his glass of brandy, or he would not be to the taste of the *Sieur Bérarde*, her grandfather. This her future! As well might a young nightingale, singing under acacia flowers in spring, talk of its future when it should be roasting on the spit to give a mouthful to a boor!

'Do you not intend to refuse?' he said

abruptly, without thinking whither such suggestion might lead her.

She turned quickly and looked at him with astonished eyes ; her breath came and went more quickly.

‘Refuse!’ she repeated. ‘Refuse! oh no ; what would be the use? No one refuses to do what my grandfather has decided for them.’

‘But you cannot be willing to make such a marriage?’

She was astonished and troubled by the rebellious suggestion.

‘I do not think about it,’ she replied at last, shaking the hair out of her eyes. ‘It is a thing which is to be, you know. What is the use of thinking? I am not to leave Bonaventure. I should not like to marry anyone who would not live on Bonaventure ; but if I stay here and live as I always have done, it will not make any difference at all.’

He was silent. This absolute ignorance of what she talked about seemed to him pathetic and sacred. He did not wish to be the one to break away the wall which stood between her and the realities of life.

‘He thinks of making a *chantier* here,’ she

explained ; ‘ the only doubt is whether anyone will ever come such a distance to order a boat or a brig ; and whether it would really pay to bring the timber out so far as this——’

‘ Good heavens ! ’ said Loswa again.

‘ Why are you so surprised ? ’ she said, looking at him in perplexity.

‘ How can you think about timber and shipwrights ? ’ he said, irrationally enough he knew. ‘ What a life for you ! I thought you loved Racine and Corneille.’

‘ But there is no one else here who loves them,’ she answered with a little sigh. ‘ It is only making money that they care about—money—always money—and when it is made nobody enjoys it.’

‘ But who can oblige you to marry this man of St. Tropez ? ’

She ruffled her hair, not very well knowing what to reply.

‘ It is decided so,’ she answered at last.

‘ But many things are decided for us which we do not accept. No one has any right to dispose of our own future against our own will.’

She looked vaguely troubled : the sense of

herself as of an independent entity had never before presented itself to her.

‘All those things are settled for one,’ she said with some impatience. ‘It is not worth talking about. Whether it is Gros Louis or another, it is the same to me. They are all stupid, they all smoke, they all drink when they can, they all say there is no God, and that there must never be any kings. They are all just alike.’

She was not conscious of the sombre revolt and vague contempt which were at work in her as the heat of the distant thunder cloud dulls slightly the sunny blue of a June sky.

‘But there is another world than theirs,’ said Loswa.

‘Out of the books?’

‘Yes, beside the dreamland of the books. All the earth is not peopled with shipwrights and skippers. There is a world——’

He hesitated, for he was afraid of alarming her ; it seemed to him that, were she displeased, she would send him spinning down the cliff with short ceremony.

‘There is a world where life is always *en fête*, where women are treated not as goods and

chattels and beasts of burden, but as sovereigns and sorceresses ; where you yourself——’

‘ I shall never go there,’ she said, abruptly interrupting him. ‘ Do not talk about it. It makes me restless. I feel as I do when I look over there.’

She pointed northward, where the unseen shore was.

‘ I see the sun shine on the mountains, and I see a dazzle of gold, a gleam of white, a long low line under the blue of the hills, and I know that is what they call the world, the big world ; but I never land there ; it is not for me.’

‘ Let me take you,’ he said softly.

‘ No,’ she said with petulance and resolution. ‘ Grandfather does not allow me ever to see the mainland without him ; he says it is accursed, that the people are all mad. And now, as you have eaten and drunk all you will, it will be best that you should go : he may return any time, and he does not love strangers.’

‘ But I may come back and bring you your portrait ?’

Her eyes smiled, but she said carelessly, ‘ That can be as you like. You are very welcome to what you have had. I will show you

the way to the shore, though I dare say you would find it again by yourself.'

He endeavoured to linger, but she gave him no leisure to do so. She escorted him to the edge of the steep descent, and there bade him a decided adieu.

Loswa, with all his grace and ease and habits of the world, felt at a loss before this child. He would have kissed her hand in farewell, but her arms were folded on her chest as she stood on the rock above him, and nodded to him a good-humoured good-bye; cheerfully, indifferently, as any boy of her years might have done.

'It is easy to see that you come from Paris!' she called after him, watching his descent along the *passerelle* with a kindly little laugh at the hesitation of his steps.

'Let her marry Gros Louis!' he thought angrily, as that clear childish laughter echoed through the sunlit air from above his head. 'I have her portrait—that is all that matters.'

What a feature of the next year's Salon would be that brilliant, bold head when it should be hung in the full light of a May day,

for all Paris to gaze upon, marked '*D'après Nature*,' and signed Loswa !

He soon, despite his indolent limbs, which were more used to the boulevards than to the sand and the shingle, regained his boat, and pushed it in deep water.

Damaris Bérarde stood above on the brow of the cliff, amongst the olive-boughs and the great leaves of the fig-trees, looking towards that pale golden far-off shore where 'the world' was a world with other men than Raphael and Gros Louis, with other fruits than the round orange and the black olive, with other music than the tinkle of the throat-bells of the goats.

CHAPTER IX.

Two days later Loswa entered the drawing-rooms of St. Pharamond, bearing with him a covered panel, which, after his ceremonious salutation of his hostess, he uncovered and placed on an unoccupied easel before her.

‘Ah! my charming sea-born savage!’ said Nadine as she approached it.

It still looked only a sketch, but it is a very sincere man who will display a sketch without touching it up and embellishing it, and Loswa was not sincere in that way, or in many others. He had copied his original drawing done upon the island, enlarging and improving it, and, though the portrait had the look of an impromptu creation, an *impression* vivid and masterly, it was in reality the product of many hours of painstaking labour and elaborate thought. Produced however it might be, it was one of the most brilliant studies which had

ever come from his hand. It was not idealised or made artificial ; it was the head of the girl as he had seen it in the full light of the morning on Bonaventure. The eyes had the frank, fearless, childish regard which hers had, and the whole face seemed speaking with courage, ardour, health, and imagination.

There was a chorus of admiration from all the great people who were there ; it was her *jour*, and the rooms were full. Anything drawn by Loswa instantly elicited the homage of that world of fashion in which his powers were deemed godlike, and this sketch had qualities so rare and true that even his enemies and hostile critics would have been forced to concede to it a great triumph of art.

‘ You have succeeded,’ said Nadine, as she put out her hand to him with a smile. ‘ You were right and I was wrong. You have painted the portrait without spoiling it by any affectations. No living painter could have done it better, and few dead ones.’

Loswa inclined his graceful person to the ground before her, and murmured his undying gratitude for the condescension of her praise.

‘ *Tout de même, elle me le paiera,*’ he thought,

remembering the words she had spoken to him on the sea-terrace.

‘And how did Perseus find Andromeda?’ she asked. ‘It must be a story to be told in verse in the old fashion. Relate it!’

‘There has been very little romance about it,’ said Loswa, ‘and Andromeda, alas! is contentedly going to marry a boat-builder, stout, ugly, and old!’

‘My dear Loris, that will be for you to prevent,’ said Nadine, still gazing at the sketch. ‘I have never seen a face with more character or more suggestion. *C’est un type*, as the novelists say. If she do marry the boat-builder, he will have a stormy existence. There are daring and genius in her face. Come—sit there and narrate your adventures with her.’

Never unwilling to be the hero of his own stories, Loswa seated himself where she bade him, and, becoming the centre of a circle of lovely ladies, he embellished and heightened the narrative of his expedition to Bonaventure as he had done the sketch, making his own part in it more romantic, and the reception of Damaris warmer than either had been. He had a very picturesque fashion of speech, and the little

incident, under his skilful treatment, obtained the grace and the colour of a story of Ludovic Halévy's. The portrait could not open its lips and contradict him. Only his hostess thought to herself, with amusement: 'I wonder how much of all that is true!'

Whilst he was talking and drawing towards a close in his admirably-coloured narrative, Melville and Othmar together entered the room behind him, and the former caught the name of his favourite of the isle.

He listened in silence till Loswa paused to take breath at the end of a sentence; then, with a very angry gleam in his clear eyes, he interposed:

'So, M. Loswa, you have found the latitude and longitude of Bonaventure without a pilot! Your portrait on that easel is very like, but I confess I do not recognise the same verisimilitude in your narrative.'

Loswa, who had paused to meditate on the end of his adventure, which he felt could not be told with the tame finale which it had had in real life, was disconcerted, and for a moment silent.

'I have seen your heroine this morning,'

pursued Melville; 'I am distressed to disturb your romance, but she is not the mingling of Gretchen and Graziella you have just described. I left her busied in feeding the pigs.'

'I dare say Gretchen and Graziella both fed pigs,' said Loswa with some ill-humour. 'At least, Monsignor, you will admit that I have proved to the Countess Othmar that I was capable of making a study of the betrothed of Gros Louis.'

'That is feeding the pigs with pearls indeed,' said Nadine.

'The pigs are a better destiny than many another,' said Melville.

'You cannot seriously think so?'

'I do, indeed. If you had seen the dark side of life, Madame, as I have done, you would think so too.'

'No, never. That young girl has genius, or something very like it, in her face. I will send for her, and show her that there are other fates possible for a young Hebe with the brows of Athene.'

'That would be a cruel kindness if you like,' said Othmar, who had been attentively studying the portrait.

‘And that is for once a commonplace remark, my dear Otho. Nothing which takes the band off the eyes is really unkind.’

‘I do not know,’ said Othmar. ‘Great ladies like you have pets which are not the happier fated for the petting: the dog is shaved and frizzed, the bird is caged and killed, the marmoset is adored and neglected; if they were all left to their natural fates they would be less honoured but longer lived. Yonder palms are honoured too, no doubt, by being allowed to stand in a corner of your room behind a lacquered screen and in a gilded basket, but they have neither light nor air, and will be dead, and when they are so, will be replaced in a month.’

She smiled. ‘How little you know about it! and what perilous things metaphors always are! The palms go back to their glass-houses and thrive as well as they did before, while other palms take their place in my rooms. You talk a little like a Socialist lecturer; your arguments are all invectives and—what is the logician’s word?—pathetic fallacies!’

‘Which is the glass-house to which you

could send any human being whom you had taken from obscurity and contentment?’

‘The glass-house is the world, which is always ready for novelties as the hothouses are ready for new seedlings. How can you tell that this handsome child may not be destined to make the world her slave? Besides, even in the interests of Gros Louis himself, it is as well that the consciousness should come before instead of after.’

‘And certainly,’ said Loswa, ‘no one can say that Gros Louis is a fate meet for this exquisite child?’

Melville hesitated: ‘Gros Louis is not a very admirable person; he is an unbeliever, of course very avaricious, and of a rough coarse exterior; but he is a good-tempered man and a very laborious worker. On the whole, worse things might happen to Damaris Bérarde than to live always on her island and rear her children there, as she now rears her *poussins* and her puppies.’

‘That is looked at from a very low plane, Monsignor; unusually low for you.’

‘I can imagine so many things worse for her, that is all,’ said Melville, with an apology

in his tone. 'Certainly she ought to have a mate like a shepherd in Theocritus' pastorals, but as those shepherds exist not, at least this side of the Alps——'

'Why a shepherd at all?'

'Because they are better than hunters,' said Melville curtly.

Loswa smiled.

'Monsignor is prejudiced to-day,' said his hostess. 'Decidedly this Galatea must be worth seeing, and the island itself sounds idyllic. I did not know there was anything so near us still so like Bernardin de St. Pierre. Dear Melville, go and bring your treasure to us just as she is; just as Loswa has sketched her, red cap, bare feet, and striped sea-gown. The moment these people are *endimanchées* they are horrible.'

'She does not belong to "those people,"' said Melville, a little impatiently. 'Her mother was an actress of Paris. I think you might dress her how you would, she would look well. She has a patrician look like those girls of Magna Grecia, who are as ignorant as the stones they tread, but have the port of goddesses.'

'I will see this especial young goddess,'

said Nadine, who never relinquished a whim when it encountered opposition.

Melville was seriously annoyed.

‘Will you make Gros Louis more acceptable to her?’ he said angrily.

‘No; we shall make him impossible.’

‘You will create one more *déclassée*, then, when there are already so many!’

‘What? By seeing her once?’

‘Yes,’ replied Melville with a certain sternness. ‘Once is enough. Discontent is born at a touch. Content is a thing which no one can create; but discontent almost anyone can bring about with a word. Merely to see you, Madame, would be to render this poor child wretched and ashamed all the rest of her days. I mean no compliment; only a fact. You float in the very empyrean of culture; you can only make this young barbarian conscious of her barbarianism. What is the curse of our age? That every class is wretched because it is straining forever on tiptoe, striving to reach into the class above it.’

‘Dear Monsignor, I think they always did. Colbert stretched the draper’s yard measure till it reached the throne, and Wolsey stood on

the chopping-block till he was tall enough to touch hands with king and pope. It is nothing new, though modern democracy thinks it is.'

'The just ambition of the man of genius is not the restless monomania of the *déclassée*.'

'Who can tell what ambition may lie under this Phrygian cap?' said his tormentor, as she looked once more at the sketch of Damaris. 'Dear Monsignor, I am so delighted when you become a little cross! It makes us feel that, after all, you are really human!'

'I am exceedingly cross,' said Melville; 'or, to speak more truly, infinitely distressed.'

'After all, Monsignor, it is not absolutely just to this involuntary recluse never to give her an occasion to estimate Gros Louis at his actual worth. According to what you and Loswa say, there are the gases of revolt already smouldering in her; surely it will be better for them to take flame before than after.'

'There are a great many lives,' said Melville, with a tinge of personal bitterness, 'in which those gases are never extinct, yet in which they are, nevertheless, not allowed to come to the surface and take fire. It may very well be so with hers.'

‘Oh, the cruelty of a priest! Decidedly you will not let her come to us if you can help it. Well, we will go to her. I owe her an apology.’

Melville trusted to his usual experience of his hostess; he knew that with her, very often, a caprice ardently desired at sunset was forgotten by sunrise; that, in default of opposition, such a mere whim as this would most likely expire as soon as conceived. He said nothing more to her, and Loswa took his sketch down from the easel.

‘I fear you are angry with me, Monsignor,’ he murmured to Melville, to whom he was always courteous and deferential. ‘Indeed, but for the challenge that Madame Nadège cast at me, I should not have ventured to find out your inviolate isle.’

‘There is no harm done,’ said Melville curtly. ‘You will not find there either Gretchen or Graziella.’

Othmar had no sympathy with this new fancy.

‘With all the world at your feet, what can you want with a fisher-girl?’ he said, when they were alone, to his wife, who replied:

‘She may be original and amuse me. There is hardly anything original in these days. One never sees anything ; and I do not think she is a fisher-girl. She may even be a genius—an Aimée Desclée—a Rachel.’

‘And do you think it is better to be a Desclée than to live and die, a happy wife and mother, *en bonne bourgeoise*?’

‘Oh, my dear, it is you who are *bourgeois* if you see anything enviable in the prose of Fate! You may be sure that, if she be a genius, and I help to open her prison doors, I am only the instrument of Destiny. Someone else would open them if not I.’

‘I thought you always ridiculed the idea of Destiny?’

‘For ordinary mortals—yes. But genius is accompanied by the *Parcæ*. It cannot escape them. Men may kill the body of Chatterton, but they cannot prevent the dead boy being greater than they.’

‘I think your project cruel,’ said Othmar. ‘If you go to this child, or bring her here, you will interfere unwarrantably with her peace and quietude, you will take her out of her

sphere ; and you can never make a *déclassée* happy. Melville is quite right.'

'A *déclassée* ! My dear Otho, what a very conventional reply. A *déclassée* is a person uprooted from her own sphere, to be placed in, or to long to be placed in, one for which she is not the least adapted. Genius is much more than adapted, it is armed in advance for any world it choose to take as its own. Rachel was an unlettered and unwashed Jewess, and Desclée was a tattered little Bohemian : but the one ruled the world, and the other made it weep like a child !'

'But I do not know why you should suppose this little girl on her island is necessarily destined to possess genius.'

'It is in her face, and it would be amusing to discover it. It would give one a Marco Polo sort of feeling.'

'It is a dangerous kind of exploration. You cannot tell what mischief may not come out of it.'

'And you do not understand that the supreme charm of a caprice lies precisely in never knowing in the least what one may come out of it.'

'But where your toys are human souls——'

‘There are no such things as human souls. It is an exploded expression. There are only conglomerates of gases and tissues, moved by automatic action, and adhering together for a few years, more or less. That is the new creed. It is not an exhilarating one, but *il en vaut bien un autre.*’

‘All this does not explain why you have taken a fancy to disturb the destiny of a little girl whom you have seen once in a boat.’

‘Because I think it may amuse me ; all original creatures and unconventional types are amusing for a little time at any rate.’

‘Oh,’ said Othmar, half in jest and half in earnest, ‘when you have once taken the idea that anything is amusing, I know cities may burn and men may die, you will not relinquish your idea till you have exhausted it.’

‘No. I do not think I easily relinquish my ideas ; it is only weak people who do that. It is true few ideas live long ; they are all *belles du jour*, the bloom of a day.’

Melville had for once erred in his estimate of his hostess. As tenacious when she was opposed as she was indifferent when unopposed, she that evening announced her intention

of taking Loswa as her pilot, and of going in person to Bonaventure.

The opposition of Melville, and of her husband, the attraction of something new, and that charm which always existed for her in the discovery and examination of anything unusual in human nature, all contributed to make her dwell on an idea which, had it not been opposed, might probably have never taken serious shape.

The master passion of her temperament remained the pleasure she took in the excitation and the analysis of character. She had always liked to bring about singular scenes, unusual situations, strange emotions, merely for the sake of observing them with the same subtle and intellectual pleasure. as a writer of romance feels in the complications and characters which he creates at will, and at will destroys. She had always brought about a perilous position when she could do so, because to enter upon one was as agreeable to her as it is to a good mountaineer to ascend to perilous heights. She had been often tempted to regret her own physical coldness, which rendered such heat of emotion and of danger as d'Aubiac's royal mistress

had known impossible to her. It was less the tragedy of passion than the psychological intricacies of character which interested her. '*Tous les amoureux sont bêtes*,' she had so often said, and so continually thought. Of all things which had bored her throughout her life the love of the male human animal had bored her the most.

But a complicated situation, a set of emotions on an ascending scale—a spectacle of troubled consciences and of disturbing elements—these it had always diverted her to watch, calm and untouched by them as any marble statue which looks from a glass window upon a storm at sea. In the language which she used the most, she said to herself that she would have given nearly all she possessed to be for once '*empoignée*' by an intense emotion.

Sometimes she would look at Othmar and think: 'It is not his fault; it has certainly not been his fault, and yet there has never been a second when my heart beat really any quicker for his coming.' In the highest heights of his own exaltation and ecstasy he had always left her irresponsible. 'You want Mignon or Juliet for all that,' she had said to him once.

It amused her now; this fancy of that unknown little island lying hidden in these gay and crowded seas. She had a fancy to see it and to divert herself with the human creature on it who she had said was '*un type*.' In the afternoon of the following day she sailed thither. Who could have hoped for an undiscovered isle on these crowded seas? She was accompanied by Béthune, Loswa, and three other of her courtiers. Othmar refused to condone what he did not approve; and Melville had been suddenly called away to Rome.

'To the new Desclée!' she said, as her yacht glided out of its harbour and bore southward through smooth sparkling sapphire waters.

'A name of melancholy omen,' said Gui de Béthune. 'Sometimes I think Aimée Desclée is the most pathetic figure of our century.'

'She was a *sensitive*; and she was a *poitrine*,' answered Nadine with her sceptical little smile, 'What does physiology tell us? That genius is only a question of brain tissue and blood-globules, and that the *Mois de Mai* and the *Prometheus Unbound* are only the conse-

quence of a kind of disease. It is so consoling for us; who have no disease, perhaps, but have also, alas, no genius! That is why the world is so fond of the physiologists. They are the great consolers of all mediocrity.'

CHAPTER X.

DAMARIS was gathering oranges and carrying them to the packing-sheds. She was bearing an empty skip upon her head, and kicking one of the golden balls before her through the grass, when a woman, unlike any woman that she had seen before, appeared to her astonished eyes amidst the emerald foliage of the orange-boughs and the lilac of the hepaticas which filled the grass.

‘I am sure you know me again?’ said the sweetest and coldest of voices. ‘I am come to apologise to you for my rudeness. Here is Loswa, who is afraid to approach you ; he will vouch for me.’

Damaris stood still and mute ; she put the basket off her head, and looked in blank stupor at her visitant ; her colour came and went painfully ; all in a moment she seemed to herself to grow ugly, awkward, coarse, foolish, every-

thing which was hideous and painful. She had no words at her command, she might have been born dumb. No man had any power to confuse her, but this beautiful woman paralysed her every nerve.

‘I am come to apologise to you for my involuntary rudeness,’ said her visitant in her sweetest manner. ‘Your rebuke was apt and very deserved, but you may be sure that had I really seen *you* I should not have incurred it.’

‘It was I who was rude,’ said Damaris, with her cheeks scarlet.

Loswa had been unable to embarrass her, but a cruel confusion possessed her before this woman, who was so unlike herself, who was so languid, so delicate, so marvellous.

‘Not that she is so very beautiful either,’ thought the child even in her bewilderment. ‘But she is—she is—wonderful! She is like those gauze-winged dragon-flies, all silver and gossamer; she is like the delicate white lilies of the tree datura; she is like, like—I did not think a woman could be like that!’

‘Do you forgive me?’ said her visitor with her sweetest smile. ‘I did not really see you,

or I should not have made such a blunder—I who detest such mistakes.’

‘I was rude,’ stammered the girl again, with difficulty finding her tongue, whilst her colour came and went with violence.

‘Oh no, you were justly on the defensive. You were offended, and took a just reprisal; the only one in your power. My dear child, M. Loswa has shown me the sketch he made of you, and told me of your hospitality to him. Will you not be as hospitable to me? I want much to make friends with you.’

The words were spoken with all the exquisite charm and graciousness in which she could put such magic, when she chose, that no one living would have resisted them, and all such little courage or such vague prejudice as might have moved Damaris against her melted before them like little snowflakes in spring before the sun amidst the lilac-buds.

‘If Madame will honour me,’ she stammered, not even seeing the men who were present, only thinking of her own rough gown, of her tumbled hair, of the state of the house filled with wood smoke, as the oven was getting ready for the baking; of the lines of washed

linen that were stretching from one wall to another.

‘How did Clovis let you pass?’ she said, struck with a sudden thought.

‘Clovis knew me again,’ said Loswa. ‘Besides, a man was at the foot of the *passe-relle*, and brought us up to you.’

‘He did not do his duty,’ said the girl with a little frown, which drew together her pencilled eyebrows.

‘The man or the dog?’ asked Nadine, amused.

‘Neither,’ said Damaris. She was angered, though she did not divine how many napoleons had passed into Raphael’s hand, who had been pruning olives, and had had much trouble to hold back the faithful Clovis, for whom gold had no charm.

‘If Brunehildt had not been shut up with her puppies,’ she added regretfully; ‘she is much more savage than Clovis.’

‘You seem very sorrowful that we did not all have the fate of Penelope’s suitors,’ said Nadine, much amused. ‘We are the friends of Monsignor Melville; may not that fact protect us? Is your grandfather at home?’

No; he was away in the sloop; gone to St. Jean with a cargo. Damaris did not add that he would have been much worse to pass than even Brunehildt.

‘But I pray you come into the house, Madame,’ she added, her natural courtesy gaining the ascendancy over her embarrassment. ‘It is a poor place, but there is a fine view, and if I had only known——’

‘You would have been *endimanchée* and hideous,’ thought Nadine, as she answered with her sweetest grace that she would go willingly to that balcony of the beauties of which she had heard so much from Loswa.

‘All her eyes are for me,’ she whispered to Béthune. ‘She does not see that any of you exist.’

‘I suppose,’ rejoined Béthune, ‘that we, after all, do not differ so very much from Raphael and Gros Louis; but between a woman and a woman of the world there is as much difference as between a raw egg and a *soufflé*, between a hen and a peahen.’

‘You might find a more poetic comparison; say a poppy and a gardenia,’ said Nadine smiling. ‘She is not at the age to think of

you. Have patience; *ça viendra*. She is really very handsome, lovelier than Loswa's sketch.'

Damaris, meanwhile, was thinking with agony that there were ready no cakes, no cream, no white bread, nothing which this delicate and ethereal visitant would be able to touch—thinking of the linen swinging in the wind, and of the bacon grey with smoke, and of Catherine, who, on washing-days, was in her crossiest mood!

Nadine, with that swift intuition into the thoughts of others which made her the most sympathetic of companions where she deigned to be sympathetic at all, guessed what was passing through the girl's mind, and hastened to relieve her embarrassment by asking to be permitted to remain out of doors, alleging that the air was so soft and the scent of the orange blossoms so sweet, that she was reluctant to leave either.

'Will Madame really prefer it?' said Damaris, unable to conceal her relief.

'There is the same view to be seen from here,' she added as she opened a door in the wall and showed them the southern sea stretch-

ing far away, shining blue and violet through arches of olive-boughs lying all hushed and bright and warm in the glow of the afternoon sun.

Then she caught a little boy by the shoulder, the son of Raphael, who was looking on stupidly.

‘Run and bring some wine and some fruit,’ she whispered to him, ‘and ask Catherine to send the old silver.’

Her sense of the obligations of hospitality was stronger than the dread of her great lady.

‘It is not because she is great,’ she told herself, angry with her own timidity. ‘But she is so wonderful, so wonderful!’

That supreme distinction in the wife of Othmar which, when she walked down a throne-room, made half the other women there look vulgar, had its charm even for this child, who could not have given a name to the superiority which awed and fascinated her, even whilst it made her ready to hide her head beneath the stones like the lizards.

Nadine, pleased with everything, or so professing herself, sat on a stone bench within

sight of the sea and quartered a mandarin orange with her white fingers, whilst the sun played on the jewels of her great rings.

‘Of all your many conquests, perhaps you have had none more flattering than the adoration and amazement of this child,’ whispered Béthune to her.

She smiled.

‘And I should not think,’ she answered, ‘that she was by nature easily daunted or easily impressed. She has reigned here, the innocent Alcina of a bucolic paradise. She has character, whether she have genius or no. Look how coolly she puts poor Loswa aside! As he discovered Alcina, it will be hard on him if he be not her Rinaldo!’

‘You are kinder to him than to her,’ said Béthune.

‘You always think ill of him.’

‘I think of his character much as I do of his art.’

‘Surely his art is admirable?’

‘It is clever; it is not sincere.’

‘My dear Duke, is not that a little hypercritical? You mean that it is a mannerism.’

‘And what is a mannerism but an affecta-

tion? And what is an affectation but a want of truth?’

‘That is a wide subject. I cannot discuss it with you just now, because I want to speak to this child.—My dear, I am a neighbour of yours; I live on the coast which you see every day; will you come and stay a few hours with me? We would show you things which would amuse you.’

‘Stay with you?’

The eyes of Damaris opened to their fullest; her face flushed scarlet; she was so amazed that she forgot her awe of the speaker.

‘Why should you want me?’ she said bluntly.

‘When you are older you will know that people want many things without knowing why they want them. But I can give you very good reasons: Monsignor Melville has interested me in you, and I think it a pity anyone so gifted as you are by nature should never see anything better than your yard-dogs and—what is your *fiancé’s* name?—Gros Louis? My poor child, how can you know what it is you do with yourself? You cannot tell what the world is like.’

‘I am very happy,’ said Damaris.

The world was a name of magic to her. How often had she not looked over the strip of sea which severed her from that dazzling shore where amethystine hills and ivory snows and silvery olive woods spoke of a world from which she was forever severed!

‘I would come to you if I were ever alone,’ she said after a pause.

‘Well, come with us,’ said her temptress smiling. ‘It is three o’clock only now. We will take you with us for a while and send you back by twilight. Loris has told you who I am.’

The name of Othmar was, even to the ears of Damaris, a spell of might upon those shores. She was flattered, amazed, touched to intense emotion, but she stammered out that, although she was most grateful, yet she dared not; her grandfather would kill her if she left the island; he was most severe; he never forgave.

‘I promise to disarm your grandfather if that is all your fear,’ said Nadine, as she thought to herself, ‘These good Communists, *je les connais*! They would string us all up to the

lamp-posts if they could, and yet, when we speak to them, they are in heaven !'

The more terrified and resolute in resistance Damaris grew, the more decided was her visitant to carry her point and succeed in her caprice.

'It is really cruel,' murmured Béthune. 'The child is happy : oh, Madame ! why pluck this wild rose only to droop in your glass-house, and be good for nothing ever afterwards ? You cannot put it back upon its stem if once you break it off——'

'Do you think to flower for Gros Louis's buttonhole is a better fate ?' said Nadine with amusement. 'I think you all are very hard to please. Usually I never notice anybody, and you say I am cruel ; when I do notice anybody you say that is cruel also ! I am just in the mood to play at being a benefactress, and you all oppose my charitable inclinations. To-morrow I may not be in the humour.'

'Precisely,' said Béthune. 'To-morrow you will wonder what you ever saw in a hedge rose, but that will not put the rose back in bloom on the hedge again.'

'The rose will cease to bloom certainly

anywhere, and that is nature's fault, and not mine.'

'I hear you love the old poets,' she said, turning to Damaris. 'Will you recite something to me? I love them too.'

'And you yawn before every stage in Paris!' murmured Béthune. But Damaris did not hear him.

'I shall say it very ill, Madame,' she murmured. She was diffident, terrified indeed; yet her vague consciousness that she had some sort of power in her, as the lark had, as the nightingale had, made the old remembered poetry come thronging in her brain and trembling on her lips as she spoke of it.

'If, after all, I have talent?' she thought, her heart seeming to beat up to her throat.

'Give us something from Esther,' said her visitor; 'that is the one play permissible to young girls.'

Damaris smiled, as if at the name of a dear friend. Those verses, which generation after generation of children have spoken since the young disciples of the early years of St. Cyr first wept over the perils of the Jewish heroine, were amongst those which most touched her

heart and pleased her imagination. Unknown to herself, she had something of the sense of loneliness of an exile, of an alien, on this little island, which yet she loved so well.

‘*Voyons, voyons !*’ said Nadine impatiently, not accustomed to, or tolerant of, being made to wait. ‘Do not be afraid. I will tell you frankly whether you have any artistic aptitude, or whether you had better stay and gather oranges and never open a poem all your life. These gentlemen will flatter you, but I shall not. *Voyons !*’

She spoke imperatively, and with the imperial air of her most resolute will. Damaris grew very pale, even to her lips, but she did not dare refuse to obey. She opened her mouth once, twice, with a deep-drawn, fluttering, frightened breath ; then she began to recite, with tremulous voice, the

Notre ennemi cruel devant vous se déclare :
C'est lui, c'est le ministre infidèle et barbare
Qui, d'un zèle trompeur à vos yeux revêtu,
Contre notre innocence arma votre vertu.
Et quel autre, grand Dieu ! qu'un Scythe impitoyable
Aurait de tant d'horreurs dicté l'ordre effroyable ?

and passed on to the passage,

O Dieu, confonds l'audace et l'imposture !

At first her timidity was so great that she was almost inaudible, but at the fifth and sixth lines the charm which the words possessed for her began to absorb her thoughts, to take her out of herself into the region of poetic feeling, to spur and stimulate and strengthen her. Nature had given her tones full of tenderness and power, and capable of many varying emotions, and the dramatic instinct, which was either inherited or innate in her, made her give wholly unconsciously the just expression, the true emphasis, the accent which best aided the meaning of the verse, and best shaped its harmonies and grace.

Her first embarrassment once passed, the animation and spirit natural to her returned; her intuitive perception made her lend the required force and feeling to each verse; she could have recited the whole of the play with ease, so familiar to her were the lines of all the few volumes she possessed. Night after night, in her little balcony, when everyone slept except herself and the nightingales, she had declaimed the speeches *sotto voce* for her own delight, living for the hour in the scenes they suggested, and forgetting all the more sordid

details of the existence which surrounded her, seeing only the moon and the sea and the orange flowers. At any other time her meridional accent, her childish exaggeration of emphasis, and southerner's excess of gesture, would have incurred the ridicule of her hypercritical auditor. But now the critic was in the mood to be kind and to be easily pleased. She closed her ears to the defects, and only noted with approbation the much there was to praise and to approve in the untaught recitation of a girl of fifteen, who had never seen a stage or heard a recital in the whole of her short life.

Damaris paused abruptly, and with a startled look, like one awakened out of dreamland into rough reality.

'I beg your pardon, I forgot myself,' she said stupidly, not well knowing what she meant and hardly where she was.

She did not hear the eager praises of the gentlemen about her; she only heard the sweet cool voice of the woman who was her judge, and who had listened in impassive silence:

'My dear, you have talent,' said that voice. 'Perhaps you have even genius. With all that

music in your shut soul you must not marry Gros Louis.'

Damaris looked at her wistfully, with all the colour hot in her face, and her heart beating visibly. Then, she could not have told her why, she burst into tears.

'*Une sensitive!*' murmured her visitant a little impatiently. 'You see, my dear Duke!—it is Aimée Desclée, not Rachel; Adrienne Lecouvreur, not Mlle. Mars.'

'The greater pity then to take her from her orange-groves,' answered Béthune. 'What will Paris or the world give that will compensate for all her loss?'

Damaris did not hear. With shame at her own emotion, and unwillingness that it should be pitied or observed, she had turned away, and had been sobbing silently over the uplifted head and questioning face of Clovis, who had come upward to inspect the strangers.

'If Esther can move her so greatly,' said Nadine with her little ironical smile, 'what will Dona Sol do and Marion de l'Orme?'

'I do not think,' said Béthune, 'that it is Esther which moves her now; it is your abrupt revelation to her of her own powers.'

Surely to discover you have genius must be like discovering that you have a snake in your breast and eternal life in your hand.'

She laughed, and went to where Damaris stood with the dog, striving to conquer her weakness.

'My dear child, surely you cannot weep for Gros Louis? Nay, I understand; I startled you because I told you that if you study and strive you can do great things. I believe so. If you wish I will help you to do them.'

The girl was silent. So immense was the vision which opened before her, and so enormous to her fancy were the perils and difficulties which stretched between her and this promised land, that she was mute from awe and from amazement.

Always to dwell on Bonaventure, always to steer and sail on the sea, always to gather the olives and oranges, always to see the sun rise over the wild shores of Italy and set over the coast of Spain far away in immeasurable golden distances, always to run up and down the rocks like the goats, and swim like the dolphins, and go to bed with the birds and get up with them — this had been the only life she had known.

For the moment she could attain no conception of any other. She had seen the churches at Villefranche and Eza, and she had seen the building-yards of Villefranche and St. Tropez, and that was all; her only idea of the great world was of a perpetual fête-day, with the priests always in their brodered canonicals, and the church bells always ringing, and the people always thronging in holiday attire, and going up and down sunny streets noisily and laughing.

That was all she could think of; and yet Imagination, that kindest of all the ministers of humanity, had told her there must be more than this somewhere; had filled her mind with many dim, gorgeous, marvellous pageant-tries which grew up for her from the black printed lines of 'Sintram' and 'The Cid.' There must be something better than the Sundays of the mainland—— And yet to leave her island seemed to her like leaving life itself!

All these conflicting thoughts striving together in a mind which was vivid in its fancies and childish in its ignorance moved her to an emotion which she could neither have controlled nor have described; she could find no

words with which to answer this great lady, who seemed to her to have thrown open great golden gates before her, and let in a flood of light which dazzled her, streaming on her from unknown skies. And at last she yielded.

‘Catherine, I am going on the sea,’ she cried, as she ran indoors, blushing to the roots of her hair at the subterfuge, for she was very truthful.

The old woman, invisible for the smoke as she stooped over the great oven, with the handle of its door in her hand, grumbled some cross words which were neither assent nor dissent. Damaris took them as the former, and waited for no more; she passed half her life on the sea, the old servant would find nothing strange in her absence if she were out till sunset.

‘You are sure I shall be back by Ave Maria?’ she said timidly to her temptress.

‘Certainly,’ said Nadine, who knew well that it was not possible.

‘I am sure I ought not to come,’ said the girl wistfully.

Her temptress smiled a little.

‘Oh, my dear, if you be as feminine as you

look, that consideration will only add *la pointe à la sauce.*'

Damaris gazed at her with pathetic, impassioned eyes. She did not understand; she said nothing; she only sighed.

'Come,' said the enchantress.

'I think Othmar was right. It is cruel,' murmured Béthune.

'Men are always so timid,' said Nadine with her customary indulgent contempt for them. 'Ignorance is not bliss, my dear friend, although the copy-books say so.—Come, my pretty demoiselle, come and see our enchanted coasts; we will not harm you, and we will only give you a little spray of moly such as Ulysses gathered; and perhaps a magic ring and a wishing-cap, nothing worse.'

The child hesitated still; she knew that she was doing very wrong; she knew that if what she was doing were discovered, her grandfather's chastisement would be pitiless; but curiosity, imagination, interest, were all enlisted on the side of disobedience, and she had a certain turbulence and ardour of self-will in her nature which had brought her many hard words from Catherine, and

even blows from Jean Bérarde. All these together conquered her conscience, her judgment, and her prudence; the gates of the enchanted world stood open; she might never pass through them, or see what was beyond them unless she went now.

With that reasoning she sprang down the first ledges of the stone staircase, and as lightly as a kid would have done leaped from one step to the other till she reached the edge of the sea.

She allowed her feet to be guided into the barge, and felt it dance beneath them with a strange thrill; it seemed all to be as unreal as a chapter of 'Sintram;' the lovely lady who wooed and tempted her appeared like a being from another world; the gilded prow, the embroidered flag, the rich awnings fringed with silver wavered before her in the sunlight.

Before she had known what she had actually done, the oars of the men cleft the sunshiny water, letting it flow in streams of diamonds off their blades, and the vessel had already glided away from her home.

Clovis, who was accustomed never to leave the island, but never failed to give

voice to his grief when he saw her leave him for the sea, either by swimming or sailing, stood on the strip of sand beneath the rocky steep of Bonaventure and howled in dismal solitude. She put her hands to her ears not to hear him; it seemed as if he reproached and rebuked her.

Soon he became but a little white speck beneath the red sandstone of the cliff, and the boat had reached the side of the stately schooner which awaited them in the midst of gay sunshine and azure water, whilst a flute-player discoursed sweet music from some unseen retreat.

When the island also began to recede from sight she then, and only then, began to realise what she had done.

'*C'est Bernardin de St.-Pierre tout pur,*' said Nadine, surveying with diversion the amazement and the awe of her captive.

Nothing could be more enchantingly kind than her manner, or more gentle and encouraging in its patience with the girl's stupor and timidity. She had gratified her caprice, she had won her wager, and she was sweet and gracious to the object of it. Obedi-

ence had always found her benignant if at times it had found her as quickly oblivious. This had been a little thing indeed; a very little thing; but she would have been irritated if it had escaped or beaten her; would almost have been mortified.

All her world had told her that to bring the girl thither would be a folly if not a cruelty; and for that reason beyond all others she had persevered.

Damaris, seated in the prow of the barge, had the charm for her of representing the triumph of her own will. So might some young slave, hardly acquired, on whom her fancy had been strongly and waywardly set, have represented hers to Cleopatra.

CHAPTER XI.

OTHMAR was leaning over the balustrade of the sea-terrace as the vessel returned. He looked and saw the captive from Bonaventure. A sort of vague pity mingled with irritation as he did so. Why had Nadine brought this hapless child from her safe sea silences and solitudes? It was a jest, but the jest was cruel; as cruel as that which ties the little living bird on to the bouquet that is tossed from hand to hand in jests of Carnival.

The poor sea-born curlew would do well enough left to its own nest upon the rocks, but once taken prisoner its day was done.

There were moments when the caprices of her wayward and dominant will irritated him; when her profound indifference to the consequences of any action which amused herself, and compromised others, repelled him by its coldness. What could this poor little peasant

be to her? A toy for five minutes, a plaything sought out of mere contradiction, and destined to be cast aside ere the day was done!

He watched the graceful shape of the schooner as it bore down upon the coast with a sense of regret as from some definite misfortune which might have been averted by exercise of his own will. But he had never used his will in any opposition to his wife.

Wisely or unwisely, he had never made the slightest opposition to her desires or even her fancies. Begun in the blind adoration of a lover, the habit of deference to her had continued with him, not out of feebleness or uxoriousness, but out of that gradual growth of custom which is one of the most potent influences of life. She had power over him to make him relinquish many a project, abandon many a desire, but this power was not reciprocal; it seldom or never is so between two human beings. The old proverb, that of any twain one is booted and spurred and the other saddled and bridled, has a rough truth in it.

Othmar knew nothing of, and cared as little for, this girl whose face looked with so frank an

audacity, so wistful an innocence, out of the brilliant drawing of Loswa. But he was sorry that she was not let alone. He had suffered many a bitter moment, even since his marriage, from the uncertainty of his wife's moods, from the mutability of her fancies. Constant in his own tastes, and very unwilling to wound others, her rapid changes from interest to weariness, and her profound indifference for the bruises she gave to the *amour propre* of her fellow-creatures, frequently troubled and distressed him. He was often kind to persons he disliked, to compensate them for her unkindness, or to prevent them from perceiving it.

Nadine, he knew, would think this poor child of no more account than the briar-rose to which he had likened her ; but to him it seemed wanton and cruel to have disturbed the peacefulness of her life, merely as a child casts a stone at a bird, and then runs on, not even looking to see whether the bird be bruised or has fallen.

‘Life is but a spectacle,’ she had once said to him. ‘When you go to the Gymnase do you distress yourself as to whether the actors catch cold at the wings or take a contagious disease

in a cab as they go home? Of course you do not? Then why not view life in the same manner? People bore us or please us; that is all we are concerned with. We do not follow them home in fact; we need not, even in imagination.'

But Othmar did not agree with her. Life seemed to him much more often tragedy rather than comedy; he could not divest himself of a compassion for the players, with which much fellow-feeling mingled.

'Since I married him he has become very amiable,' she once said jestingly. 'It is due to the spirit of contradiction which always exists in human nature, and which is never so strongly developed as in marriage.'

It was a jest; but there was a truth in the jest. Often he felt so much irritated at his wife's indifference, that it stimulated him to more interest or sympathy than he would otherwise have felt on many subjects and in many persons.

As he saw the yacht approach the sea-wall now, he turned away impatiently and went into the house to his books. He did not choose to assist at the festive procession which was con-

ducting this poor little wild goat of the cliffs to be offered upon the altars of caprice and flattery.

As if, he thought, a life out of the world were not such an enviable thing that we should be as afraid to destroy it as we are afraid to break a *Tanagra* statuette !

Meanwhile, unretarded by his displeasure, the schooner approached as nearly as the draught of water would permit, and the boat from it landed Damaris Bérarde at the foot of the rose-marble stairs. Béthune would have assisted her, but she sprang from the boat to the landing-stair with the assured and graceful agility of one who passed all her life in the open air, and was practised in the free exercise of all her muscles. Her eyes gazed in delighted wonder at the beauty of the place.

‘It is like Alcina’s palace,’ she said with a quick breath of admiration.

‘What do you know of Alcina?’ asked her hostess, amused.

‘I have read Ariosto,’ she answered, and then, with her extreme care for perfect truthfulness, added, ‘I mean I have read his poems, translated.’

‘It is rather your island which is like Alcina’s,’ said her hostess.

Then they led her through the gardens, which seemed all a maze of rose, of yellow, and of white from the innumerable thickets of azalea which were in bloom. Here and there, out of their gorgeous glow of colour, there rose the white form of a statue or the white column of a fountain. The sun was still high in the west; the gardens seemed to laugh like children in its warmth.

It was all so beautiful, so magical, so strange; the child whose imagination had been fed on poets’ fancies, and had grown unchecked in an almost complete solitude, expected some marvellous message, some wondrous destiny to meet her there on this threshold of a new life.

She found herself the centre of attention and of homage; everyone looked at her, spoke to her, strove to gain her notice. A vague fancy came into her mind—perhaps she was a king’s daughter after all, like the Goose Girl in Grimm’s stories, of whom Melville had told her once. Anything would have seemed possible to her, and nothing too incredible to happen at the close of this astonishing day.

They led her into the house, which was entered from the garden through conservatories filled with Asiatic and South American plants, and gaily peopled by green paroquets and rose-crested cockatoos, and scarlet cardinals, which flew at their will amongst the feathery foliage,

• They were all kind to her; full of compliment and of thoughtfulness for her; even her hostess took trouble to interest her, to explain things to her, to make her feel that she was welcome and admired. In her serge frock and her thick shoes, with her rope of pearls twisted round her throat, and her face in a rose glow of surprise and of innocent vanity and pleasure, she sat the centre of their interest, their approval, and their praise. She was a very picturesque figure with her short blue rough gown and her scarlet worsted cap. She had twisted her big pearls round her throat, and she had slipped on her Sunday shoes. She was tall, and lithe, and erect; she looked astonished, but not intimidated. If a smile were exchanged between them at her expense she did not see it, and if they looked at her much as they would have done at a ouistiti or a topaza pyra from wild woods, she was unconscious of it.

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The whole scene was enchantment to her eyes. Her natural sense of the beauties of form and of colour was at once soothed and excited by the beauty of these chambers, which had all the subdued glow of old jewels. It was still daylight, but rose-shaded lamps were burning there, and shed a mellow hue over all the brilliant colours. They brought her tea, and ices, and bonbons, things all as strange to her as they would have been to a savage from South Sea isles.

Her ignorance, her simplicity, her frank surprise amused them, and the natural shrewdness and pertinence of her replies stimulated them with the sense of a new intellectual distraction. But when they pressed her to recite, she grew shy and silent. She was not a machine to be set in action by pressure of a spring; and a certain suspicion that she had only been brought here as a plaything dawned upon her; the idea suddenly came to her that these great people were amusing themselves with her ignorance and astonishment, and when once that sting of mortified doubt had come into her mind, peace fled, and pride kept her mute and still.

Other persons came in, pretty women, and

handsome men; there was a murmur of laughter and a confusion of voices in all the rooms. She began to feel less at her ease, less satisfied, less sure of her own self. Some of the new-comers stared at her and sauntered away laughing; her one little hour of triumph was already over; she had been seen, she had ceased to be a novelty.

But it was too late to repent. She could not ask such strangers to retrace their steps for her; and she felt by intuition that this lovely sovereign, with her delicate face and her gracious smile, could have become as chill as the north wind and as terrible as the white storms, were she offended by caprice or ingratitude.

Damaris had strong natural courage, and all the hardiness of a resolute and defiant youth; but she felt a vague fear of Nadine Napraxine, which only served to intensify the fascination by which she was subdued in her presence.

Her hostess still spoke kindly to her from time to time, but soon ceased to think much about her: having once been captured and brought thither, she had ceased to be an object of great interest.

It was five o'clock; more people had driven

over from other villas; great ladies, with their attendant gentlemen. There were the usual laughter and murmurs of conversation, and general buzz of voices; the rose-shaded lamps were shining through the daylight; the sounds of a grand piano magnificently played came from the music-room; the air was full of the scent of roses and gardenias, of incense and perfume. Damaris, after a few glances cast at her, a few smiles caused by her, was forgotten and left to herself. Her head turned; her breath seemed oppressed in this atmosphere so different to her own; she felt lonely, ashamed, miserable; she shrank into a corner behind some palms and gloxinias, it was the saddest fall to pride and expectation.

Othmar and Béthune, watching her, both thought, 'She has found out she is only a plaything, and she is resentful.' Othmar thought, in addition, 'If only she knew how very little time she will even be as much as that!'

They saw without surprise, but with contempt, that Loswa, through whose imprudence she was there, avoided her, was evidently ashamed to seem acquainted with her, and

devoted himself assiduously to two or three of the great ladies. Loswa wished to show her that if he had sought her for sake of his art, he had better interests and occupation than a little peasant in knitted stockings could afford him. In himself he was angered against her for the slightness of the impression he had made on her, and the indifference with which she had treated him after he had honoured her by taking her for a model.

‘She is a little sea-mouse that came up in Miladi’s deep-water net to-day,’ he said with a slighting laugh to the great ladies who asked him about her.

Damaris overheard, and her child’s heart burnt with rage and scorn against him.

‘He broke bread with me yesterday, and he ridicules me to-day!’ she thought, with her primitive islander’s notions as to the sanctity of the rites of hospitality. She hated this soft-eyed, soft-voiced man, who had made an effigy of her with his colours, and had brought to her these cruel strangers, who had in a single hour made such havoc of her peace. And they had told her that she should be back at Ave Maria, and it was now night; deep night, she thought

it; for she did not know that though these rooms were all lit artificially, and the windows had now been long closed, behind these thick draperies of golden plush the last glow of daylight had scarcely then faded from the western skies.

What would they think on the island?— and what would Catherine and Raphael do?

No one now noticed her since they had ceased to stare at her as a young barbarian; no one now remembered her, sought her, or cared for her; she seemed likely to pass the whole afternoon in a corner, undisturbed and unremembered, like a little sea-mouse, as he called her, too insignificant even to be expelled!

On her island nothing could have daunted her, silenced her, troubled her; she was mistress there of the soil and of herself; she was proud and intrepid as any sovereign in her own tiny kingdom; but here all her courage deserted her; she only realised how utterly she was unlike all these people around her; she was only conscious of the rude texture of her gown, of the rough wool of her hose, of the sea-brown on her hands and arms, of the red

on her cheeks blown there by the wind and the weather.

All these women were delicate and pale as the waxen bells of the begonia, as the creamy column of the tuberose.

She had been innocently vain, unconsciously proud of herself; everybody had told her she was handsome, and her own sense had told her that she was born with finer mind and higher organisation than were possessed by those who were her daily companions. And now she felt that she was nothing—nothing—only an ignorant and common peasant. She was well enough at Bonaventure, but she was a poor little savage here.

Suddenly there was a general murmur of excitation and a general movement of personages, and from where she had been placed she saw the mistress of the house going forward to greet a young man who had entered as various voices had exclaimed :

‘ Prince Paul is come ! ’

They all surrounded this new-comer with murmurs of ardent congratulation. He was the Rubenstein of the great world, a rare and most sympathetic genius, and, *ce qui ne gête*

rien, he was the son of a grand duke, though he held it as a much higher title that he had been also the pupil of Liszt and the beloved of Wagner. He was one of the innumerable cousins which Nadine could claim here, there, and everywhere in the pages of the 'Almanach de Gotha,' and he was a person whose visits were always agreeable to her.

This visit was unexpected, and was, therefore, all the more welcome. In the reception of Paul of Lemberg she altogether forgot her poor little bit of seaweed off Bonaventure, and everyone did the same.

Othmar, coming through his rooms to welcome his new and unlooked-for visitor, who was a great favourite with himself, caught sight of the figure so unlike all others there, which was seated forlorn and alone on a low couch, with a group of palms and some draperies of Ottoman silks behind her.

'So soon abandoned!' he thought with compassion. 'Poor child; she looks sadly astray. She is very handsome—as handsome as Loswa's sketch,' he thought also, with a few swift glances at her.

When he too had greeted Prince Paul he turned to his wife and said in an undertone :

‘Have you forgotten another guest whom you have left there all alone?’

She looked fatigued and annoyed at the suggestion.

‘My dear Otho, go and console her; you were always a squire of distressed damsels.’

Othmar turned away and passed back through the apartments to the place where he had seen Damaris.

‘Poor little *déclassée*!’ he thought pitifully. ‘You have no power to amuse them for more than five minutes. It was cruel to bring you away from your own orange and olive shadows into a world with which you have no single pulse in common!’

With his gentlest manner he addressed her :

‘May I present myself to you, mademoiselle? My wife, I understand, persuaded you to favour us by leaving your solitudes. I am afraid we have not much to offer you in return.’

Damaris was silent. She was grateful for the kindness, but she was too offended and

pained by the position in which she had been placed to be easily reconciled to herself.

‘You are Count Othmar?’ she asked abruptly.

She was thinking of the story told her, when she was a child, by Catherine.

‘That is what men call me,’ said he. ‘Believe me, I am your friend no less than my wife is so, and I am most happy to see you beneath my roof. I first made your acquaintance through Loswa’s sketch.’

‘He was not honest about that,’ she said angrily.

Othmar smiled.

‘No artists are honest when they are tempted by beautiful subjects. He will make you the admiration of all the Paris art world next year.’

She did not reply at once. Then she repeated:

‘It was not honest. I did not think he was going to show it, and bring people to me.’

‘No; in that I think he took unfair advantage of your hospitality.’

‘That is what I mean. I shall not let him ever go back.’

‘Poor Loswa ! The punishment will perhaps be greater than the offence.’

She was again silent. She knew nothing of the light give and take of social intercourse. To her the things of life were all very serious.

He felt an extreme compassion for her, and with great patience, kindness, and tact, strove to overcome her half-fierce shyness. He talked to her in a way which she could understand and of things she knew ; of the life of the sea, of the fruits and their seasons, of dogs and their ways, of old poets and simple writers such as she loved and revered. Little by little her sullenness gave way, her face lightened with its natural smile ; she felt confidence in him and spoke to him with that candour and directness which were as common to her as its blue tint to the sea-water ; but all the while she thought with sinking heart :

‘I wonder if I might ask him how late the hour is ? I wonder if I might tell him how much I do want to go home ?’

But she did not dare to do so ; she thought it would be rude.

Othmar placed before her some volumes

of Doré's illustrations to beguile her time, and rejoined his wife, who was still occupied with the Prince of Lemberg. He was at all times one of her favourites, and he had just come from Vienna, and had many *chroniques scandaleuses* of that patrician court to tell.

‘What is to be done with this unhappy child?’ Othmar said to her somewhat sternly. ‘She is miserable and *dépaysée*.’

‘I sent you to amuse her,’ replied Nadine. ‘If you did not——’

‘You must allow me to say,’ returned Othmar, ‘that it was not worthy of you to bring that poor little peasant here, only to neglect her and make her miserable. I should have thought you were too great a lady to commit such a—will you pardon me the word?—such a vulgarity.’

She was not as angry as he had expected; she even smiled; but she remained as indifferent.

‘Vulgarity is indeed a terrible charge! I do not think anybody ever brought it against me before. I thought she was very well entertained. I supposed Loswa took care of her. He is responsible for her.’

‘No,’ said Othmar, ‘we are responsible.

She is in our house, and she came here by your invitation ; on your insistence. There is surely the law of hospitality——’

‘Among savages,’ said his wife, amused. ‘I believe it exists somewhere still on the Red River, or amongst the Red Indians; I am not sure which. We know nothing about it. We only invite people because we think they will amuse us, and we usually find that they do not. I fancied this girl would be amusing, but she is not at all so here. She is dull, and she is frightened.’

‘What else could you expect?’

‘I expected—I do not know what I expected. Genius should not be abashed by mere tables and chairs.’

‘Perhaps she has no genius. Even if she have any, to be stared at and laughed at by a number of strange people may be sufficiently embarrassing. I confess that I think you have done a very cruel thing.’

She laughed. When men are angry they amuse immeasurably a clever woman whose temper is serene. And it seemed such a trifle to her.

‘Pending your arrangements for her future,’

said Othmar after a pause of excessive irritation, 'where is she to be this evening? The second gong has sounded.'

She gave a little gesture of impatience.

'How very tiresome you are! Can she not go to the servants?'

'In my house? Certainly not. I will have no guests sent to the servants' hall. This young girl is as well born as any other of your visitors.'

'How odd you are! You will make me insist on separate establishments if you develop such quaint notions! I am sure she would be infinitely happier with the maids, and she would run no risk of becoming *déclassée*.'

'It is the only time in my life that I have found your expressions in bad taste,' said Othmar as he turned to leave the room.

She laughed: 'You had better take her into dinner yourself.'

'I shall do so if she will come.'

The door closed on him, and she looked after him with a frown of impatience and a smile of astonishment.

What a fuss about a little fisher-girl! she thought. As if the girl could not go to the

maids—go to the nurseries—go to the still-room—anywhere, anywhere. What could it matter?

She was accustomed to see her playthings no more when once they had passed an idle hour for her. Why could not somebody take away this one? She would not have been here had it not been for Loswa. It was all Loswa's fault, no one else's. And who could tell that the girl would be such a dumb, stupid, frightened creature? On the island she had had force and courage and talkativeness enough.

Why would Otho always take everything *au grand sérieux*? He should have lived on that island.

He was quite capable of taking her in to dinner, though there were high ladies of every degree staying in the house! And she hated the idea of his making himself ridiculous. She would override all customs and conventionalities herself when she chose, but she was too thoroughly a woman of the world not to regard a social solecism, a drawing-room blunder, with much more horror than she would have felt for greater crimes. Anything which made an absurd story for society was to her detestable.

‘Murder all your enemies to three generations, like a Montenegrin,’ she would say *à propos* of such matters, ‘but never make a fault in precedence at your table.’

Othmar meanwhile dressed very hurriedly, and hastened to the drawing-rooms before they could fill again. The latent chivalry of his temper was active; he would have been capable for the moment of any eccentricity to show his honour for this forlorn child.

‘What wretched artificial creatures we all are!’ he thought. ‘No wonder, when any natural life comes amongst us, it feels dazed and astray.’

The existence he led looked to him for the instant supremely absurd. The instincts towards wider freedom and plainer habits, and higher thoughts than those possible in his society, had always been in him from his youth, though they had found no issue and no sympathy; and in his marriage he had tightened around him the bondage of the world.

The brilliant rooms were deserted when he re-entered them: here and there a servant moved, attending to a lamp or carrying away a stray teacup; there was no one else.

In his gentlest tones he again addressed Damaris :

‘We are about to go to dinner,’ he said to her kindly ; ‘will you do me the honour to accompany me?’

No hunted antelope could have looked more terrified than she.

‘Dinner?’ she echoed. ‘I dined at noon.’

‘But you can dine again? The sea air always gives one an appetite. You must not starve like this in my house.’

‘I could not! I could not!’ she said with tremulous lips. She glanced in an agony of dread through the rooms where all those gay people were. The idea of dining with them appalled her more than it would have done to find herself on a wrecked vessel, in the midst of the winds and waves. What would they think of her? What errors would she not make? What could she know of their manners and fashions?

‘I could not! I could not!’ she repeated, her colour changing a dozen times a minute.

He endeavoured to persuade her, but found that it only caused her more pain. After all, he reflected, it was natural enough that she, who

had never been at any table save her own, should be appalled at the prospect of dining before a score of fine ladies and gentlemen.

He was sorry for her. He knew the rapidity with which his wife's caprices altered and her preferences evaporated. He had seen so many please her, for an hour, to weary her immeasurably whenever they afterwards presumed to recall to her the fact of their existence.

‘Well, you shall do as you please in this house,’ he said to her. ‘Remain here, and I will tell them to bring your dinner to you.’

‘Indeed—indeed I want nothing,’ she protested; ‘I could not eat.’

She was about to say to him much more than that; to say that the sun had set, the night had come, the hours were passing fast—but she could not find courage. After all, what was she?—a stupid, ignorant little sea-born savage in the eyes of all these people.

She remained where she was, silent, and miserable, yet watching with curious eyes the pageant so new to her of the lighted *salons*, the lovely ladies, the pretty procession that passed out of the drawing-rooms as they went to dinner. Could these be human beings who

lived always like this? She wondered—she envied—and yet she longed for her own free life on the waves, under the olives, climbing with the goats, diving with the gannets, rocking in the orange-boughs with the thrush and the greenfinch. It was beautiful here, magical, marvellous, incredible; yet she wanted fresh air, she wanted free movement; like a mountain-born rose shut up in a hothouse, she felt suffocated in this sultry and perfumed air.

CHAPTER XII.

As Othmar had promised, a servant brought to her, served on silver and Japanese porcelain with damask, which she took to be satin, a repast of which the dishes succeeded each other in bewildering rapidity, and looked so ethereal and pretty that it seemed to her quite grievous to break them up and eat them. The fairies themselves might have feasted off these tempting viands, and her appetite, which was the robust one of youth, proved to her that it is possible to dine at noon and yet be ready to dine again at eight. She had satisfied her hunger, however, long before the full complement of the services had been brought to her, and the fruit and bonbons best pleased her childish tastes. She gained courage to leave her corner and come from beyond the palms and move timidly about the rooms, looking now at this picture, now at that statue, and ever confronted by her own likeness

in the mirrors, and beholding it with impatience. She touched the flowers embroidered on the plush of the chairs, astonished that the blossoms were not real. She looked with wonder at the grand piano, marvelling that out of its painted panels and ivory keyboard such melodies as she had heard could have been drawn. She gazed at the figures on the Gobelin tapestries in entranced delight, and, with the unerring selection of a nature instinctively artistic, paused enraptured before the marble copy by Clésinger of the Vatican Hermes.

She who had never seen anything but Bonaventure and the fisher-people's cabins on the mainland, and the little dusky shops where the fruit was sold, was dazzled by the beauty of St. Pharamond within and without. Everything around her was strange and wonderful; the very flowers were unfamiliar; gorgeous blossoms to which she could give no names.

But when she caught sight of her own figure in the mirrors, standing amidst all the glow and delicacy of colour of these marvellous chambers, she seemed to herself barbarous, incongruous, grotesque, a blot upon the scene, a savage set amidst civilisation. All the flatteries

which had been poured out to her ear had passed by her, making little impression. There were the mirrors, which were truer counsellors than he; they showed her that she was not as these people were. She did not think she had any beauty at all, she only saw that she had none of this grace which was around her, that she was like a bit of ribbon weed from the sea amongst lilies and lilac.

She was so interested and so absorbed that she was startled as by a blow when she saw the double doors at the end of the drawing-rooms thrown open by a man with a silver chain and a white wand, and the figure of her hostess appeared led by the Prince of Lemberg and followed by all the ladies and gentlemen who had dined with her that evening.

With the swift movement of a hunted thing Damaris drew back behind a screen of plush embroidered, like the walls and chairs and couches, with silken garlands of spring flowers.

No one was thinking of her.

Even Othmar passed by the spot where he had left her without looking for her. He was talking to a very tall slight blonde woman, who

was the Princesse de Laon, and had been Blanchette de Vannes. They all went by the screen and passed on into the farthest room of all, where the Erard stood. Damaris, like a forsaken child, crouched down on the stool she had found there, and the big hot tears forced themselves from under her eyelids. It was foolish, she knew ; unreasonable, no doubt ; but the most piteous sense of mortification and of insignificance was upon her, like a heavy hand crushing her down into the earth.

At Bonaventure, despite the harshness at any disobedience with which she was treated by her grandfather, she had been in much a spoilt child ; the few people on the island were all her ministers and servants. On the rare occasions when she visited the mainland, everyone treated with reverence and flattery the heiress to Jean Bérarde's wealth and acres ; even when these great people had come to her they had praised her talent, they had suggested wild hopes to her, they had given her honeyed words ; unconsciously she had expected something very great to happen to her when she should be seen at this house where her presence was said to be so desired—to realise that

she was nothing here, less than the servants, who at least had their place and their duties in it, was the most cruel of disillusion.

Overcome by the unusual warmth and closeness of the atmosphere, which sent her blood to her temples and filled her with a strange drowsiness, she let her head fall back upon the cushion of her couch and fell asleep. She dreamed strange things. There was nothing to distract her. The servants glanced at her contemptuously and let her alone ; they had no orders about her, and in the house of Nadine no one ever dared to act without orders.

The perfumed air, the dry warmth from the *calorifères*, the profound stillness, invited slumber ; and she slept on as soundly as any tired child that throws itself upon a primrose bank on an April day.

She was roused by a sound of sweet notes like the voices of her nightingales when they sung under the orange-leaves.

In the farthest room of all, where the piano-forte stood, Paul of Lemberg had begun to play ; melodies of Tristan und Isolde thrilled through the silence to her ear and awakened her in her hiding-place. She who had never heard any

such music in her life listened with a surprised sense of delight so intense that it was also pain. The delicate rain of harmonious notes falling one on another, the strange mystery with which the chords of the instrument repeat and concentrate all the sighs of passion and the woes of feeling, all the inexplicable and marvellous humanity and sympathy with which all perfect music is filled, were heard by her for the first time in their most exquisite forms. She listened entranced, awed, and penetrated with an ecstasy which was as sharp as suffering. She forgot where she was. When silence followed she was weeping bitterly; all the wounds of her heart at once deepened a thousandfold, yet healed by a touch divine.

All the longing, all the dreams, all the vague desires and unsatisfied fancies which had been in her mind and heart untold to anyone, and misunderstood even by herself, burned to obtain utterance in this the first music she had ever heard. She crouched in her corner unseen: a servant, who had placed a lamp behind the screen, had been too discreet in his office, and too contemptuous of herself, to disturb her. She sat still on her low stool, and

listened as the harmonies succeeded each other from the distance.

Paul of Lemberg was in the mood to recall a thousand memories and invent a thousand fancies in music, and his companions were capable of giving him that comprehension and appreciation which the finest scientific knowledge of the tonic art alone can render.

In the pauses which at times ensued, the conversation was animated and absorbing; they spoke of music, always of music, and Othmar, whose greatest interest had always been found in music, forgot as well as others the guest whom his house sheltered.

When at length Lemberg rose and drank a cup of coffee, and lit a cigarette, and proceeded to *faire la cour* to the Princesse de Laon, and four violins in a quatuor of well-known artists were tuning to fill up the blank of silence he had left, Othmar, with a pang of compunction, recalled the hours during which the child had been neither seen nor sought by any one of them. It had been half-past eight when they had gone into dinner; it was now past eleven o'clock.

He went through his drawing-rooms hastily,

looking for her in every place, and failing to find her. At length, when he was about to inquire for her of his household, he saw a shadow behind the embroidered screen, and moving the screen aside, discovered her in her solitude.

‘My dear child!’ he exclaimed, ashamed at his own neglect of her, ‘where have you been? I have not seen you for hours. What a dull evening you have passed!’

The tears were dry on her cheeks, but they had left her eyes humid and heavy; her face had grown very pale.

‘I have heard all that,’ she said with a little gesture towards the distant music-room. ‘I did not think there was anything as beautiful in the world.’

‘*Une sensitive!*’ thought Othmar, recalling his wife’s half-unkind and half-compassionate expression as he answered. His knowledge of such sensitive natures induced him now to observe with an instinct of pity the trouble visible on the young girl’s face. She had an isolated, pathetic, bewildered look which touched him, and with it there was an expression of anger and hurt pride. No child lost at dark in a wood

where it had strayed through disobedience, was ever more bewildered, lonely, or punished for its sin, than she was in those radiant drawing-rooms, surrounded with the light laughter and the, to her, unintelligible chatter in which she had no share ; oppressed by this overheated, over-perfumed air in which she felt stifled and sick, abashed, and yet angered by the neglect and obscurity to which they had abandoned her.

‘I fear you want to go home, my dear,’ he said compassionately. ‘Is it not so?’

She hesitated, then answered curtly : ‘Yes.’

‘How long have you been asked, or have you promised, to stay with us?’

‘She said I should go back by sunset.’

‘My wife said so?’

‘Yes.’ She paused, then added with a tremor of terror in her voice, ‘If I be out when he comes home my grandfather will kill me.’

‘But he will know you have been safe here with us?’

She shook her head. ‘That will make no difference, Monsieur. You do not know him. Of course it is all my fault ; I did wickedly——’

‘You did, as I understand it, a natural childlike piece of disobedience ; you ought not certainly to have been tempted by others to do it, but as your grandsire will learn whom you have been with, I cannot see that he can be so very greatly angered, even if you should stay here all night.’

‘You do not know him,’ said Damaris.

She was nervous and pale ; her hands played restlessly with the pearls at her throat ; her beautiful eyebrows were drawn together in anger and distress. She did not say so, but more than once her shoulders had felt the stroke of Jean Bérarde’s heavy cudgel.

‘He must know our name very well,’ added Othmar. ‘It will surely be voucher enough to him that you have passed your time in safe keeping——?’

‘You are “aristos.” He hates you.’

He smiled ; he had seen many of these red Republicans who hated him furiously in theory, yet were never averse to worshipping the golden calf of the Maison d’Othmar.

‘Seriously,’ he said, ‘do you think that you will be punished cruelly if you should

be here all night? Are you sure that your grandfather will not be open to reason?’

‘You do not know him, or you would not ask.’

‘No; I do not know him, and so I have no right to form any opinion. But I see that what you do know of him makes you miserable at the idea of his anger. Well, then, home you must go in some manner. Our promise to you must in some way or other be kept. Wait a moment here, and I will return to you.’

Damaris looked after him with interest and gratitude. Young though she had been when the death of Yseulte had moved the hearts of the whole people on those shores, something of its sadness and of its tragedy had reached her, and still remained in memory with her like the echo of some melancholy song heard at evening in the shade of the olive-woods. They had been mere names to her, but they had been names of pathos and of meaning, like the names of Athalie, of Ondine, of Calypso, and of Helen—names attached to a story, leaving a recollection, suggesting something outside common life and ordinary fate.

‘I suppose he has forgotten her long ago,’ she thought as she looked at him as he passed through the salons.

Othmar approached his wife, and waited impatiently until there was a pause in the conversation buzzing around her. Then he bent towards her :

‘Nadège, did you really promise this child from Bonaventure that she should go home at sunset?’

‘Yes, I think I did. What of it?’

‘Only that I thought you always kept your word, and I find you have not done so.’

There was that in his tone which irritated her extremely ; she thought he spoke to her as if she were a person at fault whom he re-proved. Those nearest her could hear every word he uttered. She turned away from him with her coldest manner :

‘Tell the girl that she may sleep here ; the women will see to it. She can say that she has my commands.’

Othmar did not reply ; he moved aside and let her pass on to the room where they were playing baccarat. Had they been alone he

would have said what he thought ; as it was, he went out of his drawing-rooms and across the gardens to the boathouse on the quay.

The yacht could find no anchorage there, and was gone to Villefranche. No sailors remained there in the night time ; even the keeper of the boats did not sleep there. All the pretty painted toys were locked up in the boathouse, and the keeper had the keys, he could not even get at one of them.

‘This is the use of being master of the place !’ he said to himself with natural irritation. It had never chanced before at St. Pharamond that anyone had ever wanted to go on the sea after twilight.

He retraced his steps to the house and called two of his servants, and gave them orders to break open the door of the boathouse and take out the *Una* boat as the lightest and swiftest.

Then he returned to where Damaris awaited him.

‘You are not afraid to go on the sea in an open boat ?’ he asked her. ‘The water is like glass, and there is a full moon.’

‘Afraid—on the sea !’

She could have laughed at the idea; the sea was her comrade and playfellow, and had never harmed her. She was no more afraid of its storms than of Clovis's teeth.

'Then you shall go home,' he said briefly. 'Come with me.'

'I can go home?' she exclaimed in ecstasy.

'Yes, if you are not afraid of an open boat; there are no other means.'

'Oh, I can sail it myself! I steer with my foot, and sail very well.'

'You shall not go wholly alone,' said Othmar with a smile. 'I regret that to speed the parting guest is the only form of old-fashioned hospitality which it is possible for me to show you.'

Damaris hesitated a moment.

'Must I not say farewell to Madame?'

'Madame is occupied,' he said as curtly. 'Come, my dear. Unless you are sure you would not sooner stop here and return in the morning?' he added. 'My wife badé me say she would be happy if you would so decide.'

'Oh no!' said Damaris, with terror in her

eyes. 'I could not, I dare not ! My grandfather may be home at sunrise.'

'Come, then,' said Othmar.

She needed no second bidding, but willingly followed him through the gardens to the landing-place of the little harbour. The moon was brilliant; the cedars and other evergreen trees spread their boughs over the marble balustrades; the aloes and cacti raised their broad spears and showed their fantastic shapes in the clear white light; there was a marble copy of the Faun which laughed at the stars; the waves were gently rippling over the last stair, the sea spread smooth as a lake as far as the eye could reach; the lights of Villefranche glittered in the darkness in the curve of the shore; the air was fragrant with the scent of millions of violets and of the tall bay thickets under which they bloomed.

Othmar paused involuntarily.

'How seldom we look at the night !' he said with an unconscious sigh.

'It is so beautiful here!' she said with a sigh which echoed his, but had a very different emotion for its source as she looked with timidity at the marble Faun. She had never

seen a statue before ; she was not sure what its meaning was, but the sweet laughing face whose lips seemed to move in the moonlight bewitched her.

‘It is as beautiful on your island, no doubt,’ he answered, ‘and far more natural. This place is almost wholly conventional.’

The word said nothing to her ; she had never heard it before. She was gazing at the marble statue.

‘What does that mean?’ she said with hesitation.

‘It means youth—the treasure you have,’ said Othmar. ‘Do not want any other. They have tried to teach you discontent. They have been very wrong. You have not been happy here.’

‘No—not quite,’ she said, afraid to seem ungrateful, yet obliged to tell the truth.

‘No ; you have felt remorse ; you have been wounded by neglect ; and you have been allured by the artificial and the insincere. Take warning : the world would give you just what this house has given you.’

The Una boat was at the foot of the stairs ; its little sail was spread, there were cushions and

shawls inside it; the men of the household whom Othmar had summoned had made everything ready, and waited there.

‘Tell your lady,’ he continued to his men, ‘that I am gone on the sea; shall be back probably before dawn.’

Then he waved them aside and launched his boat into deep water.

Othmar gave his hand to Damaris; she touched it, but vaulted into the boat without his aid. When she saw that he followed her she grew scarlet, and her large eyes opened with that look of amaze which so well became her.

‘You—you——’ she stammered, and could utter no other word.

‘Certainly,’ said Othmar. ‘Since you have been deceived into coming to my house, I will at least see you safely back to your own.’

She was still so astonished that she could form no protest and shape no thanks.

‘You must steer,’ he said to Damaris as he handled the sail.

She still said nothing, but she took the tiller-ropes. The little vessel glided easily through the peaceful waves; the wind, by a

favouring chance, blew lightly from the north-west ; it plunged with the grace and swiftness of a gannet into the silvery moonlight and the phosphorescent water.

Othmar gave his companion a little gold compass set at the back of a watch.

‘You must guide our course,’ he said to her. ‘Bonaventure is as unknown to me as Japan to Marco Polo.’

‘I shall make no mistake,’ she said, finding her voice for the first time since she had seen him enter the boat. ‘I have steered on Sundays from Villefranche home. But—but—I cannot bear to trouble you ; it is not right.’

‘You give me a charming moonlight sail,’ said Othmar ; ‘and you will show me a *terra incognita*. I am immeasurably your debtor. But for you I should still be indoors in warm rooms with artificial light and an artificial laughter round me. One can have enough of that any evening.’

‘If I did not like it I would not have any of it,’ said Damaris, with her natural manner returning to her.

‘I am not sure that I do not like it,’ said

Othmar ; ‘and, at all events, the person I most wish to please likes it. That must be sufficient for me.’

Damaris looked at him ; she did not say anything. She was thinking of that day when she had gathered the daffodils, and the swallows had flown about her head, and the old woman Catherine had said : ‘Holy Virgin, to think she was so unhappy!’ Were they all unhappy, these great people, although they had everything on earth that they could want or wish?

Life outside the island seemed to be a terrible perplexity.

‘Mind how you steer,’ said Othmar, as in the multiplicity and gravity of her thoughts they drifted perilously near the troubled water churning in the wake of a steam yacht. With prompt dexterity and coolness she corrected her oversight in time.

‘There are few things more delightful than being at sea at night when the moon is bright, and the vessel is small enough to make one very near the water,’ he said, as they pursued their course and he aided the passage of the boat with the oars. ‘Just like this, between

the sea and sky, with all those stars above, and all the silent night around one—one ought to be a poet to be worthy to enjoy it, or able to put the charm of it into fitting words.’

‘Yes.’

She had felt herself what he said so often, and she too had never been able to find speech for that deep delight, that nameless melancholy, which came to her with the solitude of the sea at night.

He looked at her as she sat at the tiller with the moonlight falling full upon her face, and making it older and more spiritual than it had been by day. So she would look when years had saddened her, chastened her, etherealised her, taken from her the boylike buoyancy of her spirit, the frank audacity of her childhood. Or rather, no;—she would not look like that, she would have wedded Gros Louis, have had sturdy, healthy, riotous children plucking at her skirts; have grown heavier, stouter, coarser, duller; have ceased to care about the moonlight on the sea; have heeded only the sea’s harvest of tunny, crawfish, cod, and haddock. Poor Galatea, whom the Polyphemus of a common marriage would bind upon her

rock with all the greedy waves of common cares leaping at her and licking her with unkind tongues! Yet there was no fate better for Galatea than her rock: he was persuaded of it; he wished her to be so persuaded.

CHAPTER XIII.

As the boat went smoothly and fleetly over the calm water, through the silvery night, beneath the immense vault of the starry heavens, he talked to her with kindly gentleness, and heard from her all there was to hear of her short life and of her great love for Bonaventure.

The course they took was almost wholly free of vessels; some heavy brig, fish or fruit laden, alone crossed their path, and the great green or red lights of the steamships were always afar off. The navigation of their little vessel did not so engross either of them that they had not leisure to converse, and Damaris, in the dusk of the night, in the familiar sea breeze and sea scent, in the motion of the boat which was as welcome and soothing to her as the rocking of its nurse's arms to a child, felt an exhilaration which restored her

spirits and loosened her power of speech. She ceased to be afraid of the chastisement she would receive at Bonaventure, and she felt a confidence in the kindness and the protection of her companion which was very different to the flattered vanity and fascinated awe which his wife had aroused in her.

That he was a *grand seigneur* did not affect her with any sense of diffidence, both because the granddaughter of Jean Bérarde had been reared in an utter indifference to such divisions of rank, and also because in her own heart she fondly nourished the legend of her own pure descent. The sea lords of the mountain above San Remo were as true and near to her in her belief as Hugh Lupus to the Grosvenors, as Hugues Capet to Don Carlos.

It had been eleven o'clock when they had left the quay of St. Pharamond. It was dawn when they came in sight of the island ; its grey olive-crowned side fused softly with the silvery dusk which preceded the sunrise. There was no sail in sight, except in the offing to the eastward some score of barques looking no larger than a flock of sea-swallows : they were those of a coral fleet.

‘Is that your little kingdom?’ asked Othmar, looking towards the cloudlike isle which seemed to float between the sea and sky. ‘Well, it must be a charming life all alone there amidst the waters, far away from the world and all its fret and fume. You must be happy there?’

‘Oh yes,’ she answered rather doubtfully, without the spontaneous whole-heartedness which had characterised her replies to Loswa. ‘But, you see—there is a good deal of the fret and the fume—because we trade with the mainland, and when prices are bad my grandfather is out of temper. It is not like Fénelon’s island at all.’

‘Even if not, be sure it is happier to be on it than amidst the world,’ said Othmar, anxious to undo what his wife and her friends had done. ‘The pastoral life is the best there is, and when it is joined to the liberty of a seafaring life, it seems to me to be perfect.’

‘I believe, at least I know,’ he continued with some hesitation, ‘that my wife spoke to you of your talents, and of all they might do for you in that bigger world which is to you only “the mainland.” Perhaps they might do much, perhaps they might do nothing; that

world is very capricious, and its rewards are not always just. Poets are charming companions, but they are not infallible guides. Fate has given you a safe home, a tranquil lot, a sure provision. Do not tempt fortune to desert you by showing it any ingratitude. I fear my words seem very cold and dull ones after the gorgeous flatteries you have heard, but they at least are wise as I see wisdom for you; and, believe me, they are well meant.'

He spoke with earnestness as the boat approached the island, and, with the sail lowered, drifted lightly before the wind towards the beach.

'Will you tell your grandfather?' asked Othmar, as they neared the isle.

'Do you think that I ought?' she said in a very low voice, in which was an unspoken supplication.

'I think you ought,' he answered. 'Do not begin your life with a secret.'

She was silent.

'Surely,' he continued, 'he will not be very angry when he knows that you were so much pressed by the Countess Othmar, and that I have myself brought you home. He will be

sure you have been as safe as with himself. I will come and see you again some day.'

The face of Damaris clouded. She was silent, occupying herself with guiding the vessel through the surf which broke on the broad shell beach of Bonaventure.

The mists were white and soft, the head of the cliffs was invisible in the tender silvery fog; she could hear the voices above her of Clovis and Brunehildt. The boat was run ashore, and she leaped out before Othmar could aid her.

'You are vexed with me,' he said with a smile. 'But, indeed, my dear, it would be a life-long regret to me if, through any suggestion or persuasion of my wife's, you were brought into a life which failed to answer your ideal of it, and rendered you unfitted to return to the simplicity and quiet of this happy little place. There are neither knights nor lions nowadays for Una. She must defend herself in a bitter warfare in which her sex is only a weapon against her, while her enemies are without scruple. Adieu, you will prefer to go up alone.'

She turned quickly, and looked up at him with a contrite, timid little smile.

'I have no doubt you are right, only—one

dreams things—sometimes. I ought to thank you so much: you have been very good to me.'

'Not at all. I have had a charming night upon the sea, and am your debtor.'

Then he begged her to keep the little gold compass in memory of that evening, raised his hat, and left her.

'Can you manage the boat alone?' she cried to him in anxiety.

'Quite well,' said Othmar, as he pushed it through the surf.

When he was some roods from the shore he looked back; he saw the figure of Damaris still standing where he had left her, the silvery green mass of the olive-clothed cliffs rising behind her till they were lost in the hovering clouds of mist. The barking of the dogs came faintly over the sea, and a bell tolled from above the daybreak call to work.

'I have done what I can,' thought Othmar, 'but the poison is there. No antidote, even if it succeed, can ever make the blood quite what it was before the virus entered. And what are ambition and discontent but as the bite of a snake when they seize on a woman—a child?'

Then he went back over the calm blue water, while with every moment the white light in the east spread further, and the mists lifted and the winds dropped, and soon in all its glory rose the sun.

To this man, whose youth had been full of high ideals, which his manhood had found it utterly impossible for him to fulfil, there was something which touched him profoundly in all youth which, as once his own had done, looked forward to the world as to some field of combat, where the fair flowers of faith and of justice would possess a magical strength like the lilies and roses wherewith the nymphs smote Rinaldo.

To the eyes of men, Othmar appeared the most enviable of all persons; to the society around him, as to the multitudes to whom he was but one of the great names which govern the destinies of nations, it seemed that few living beings had ever enjoyed so complete a happiness and prosperity as did he. But in the bottom of his own heart there was a latent bitterness, which was disappointment. He could not have said where or how precisely this sense of failure came to him, in the midst

of what was absolute success and entire fruition of all his wishes. Yet it was there. It is the accompaniment of all power and of all possession. Contentment looks from a narrow lattice on a tiny garden bounded by a high box hedge. Culture has the vast horizon of the universe and finds it small, it can measure the stars, and sighs to wander beyond their spheres. Dissatisfaction is the shadow which goes with all light of the intelligence. The uncultured mind can be content ; the cultured, never.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAMARIS went slowly from the cliffs through the moonlight ; her heart was heavy. She had had a great temptation, a great joy, a great disillusion, and a great grief, each following close on the heels of the other in the short space of a few hours.

She came back to her poor little isle with something of that remorse, that dejection, that sense of all the golden fruits being but ashes at the core, with which the great ones of earth, after reaching the highest heights of power or of fame, will come back to their lowly village birthplace and think with a sigh, 'Could I but be as once I was !'

The night seemed far severed from the day which had heralded it as if by long years : never more could she rise in the daybreak quite the same child who had leaped to the lattice, and laughed at the sunrise on the sea, that morning.

She did not reason on the change in her, nor understand it, but she felt it.

When the little velvet-hided calf has been branded in the stock-yard with the cruel iron, never more (though turned loose again) will it frolic the same in the prairie grass unwitting of pain or ill.

She took her way slowly over the head of the cliff across the breadth of pasture where a few days before she had led Loswa. There was a dusky crouching figure waiting in the shadow of the orange-boughs; it was that of old Catherine the servant, who sprang towards her and gripped her arm with both hands.

‘He is come home!’ she said in a loud, terrified whisper.

‘My grandfather!’

Bold though she was by nature, her lips and cheeks grew cold and her heart stood still.

‘Who else!’ cried the old woman roughly. ‘For who else would I keep out of my bed at such an hour to watch for you? Where have you been all the while?’

‘I have been with the lady.’

Her voice sounded very dull and hopeless;

it melted the heart of the peasant who loved her.

‘Well, well, you have had your will and your vanity, and have paid for them both!’ she said, less harshly. ‘Poor little fool! It is your mother’s light blood working in you, I suppose; you’re not to blame. They are to blame who bred you. I have watched for you ever since I gave him his supper. He asked where you were. I said you were asleep. He has had a good deal of brandy. If you get in by the scullery door, and take your shoes off, and go softly up the stairs, he will not hear, and nobody knows you have been away save Raphael and myself. That is why I waited outside, to stop and tell you that you might creep in unseen.’

Damaris stooped her tall head and kissed the woman’s withered cheek:

‘That was like you, dear Catherine!’

‘More fool I, perhaps. I will punish you come morning, never fear. But I should be loath for you to see Bérarde to-night. Get in.’

Seeing that Damaris did not move, she pushed her by the shoulder.

But the words which Othmar had spoken

were echoing in the ear, and sounding at the conscience, of the girl, bearing a harvest which he had never dreamed of when he had uttered them. There was that in them which had aroused all the courage and exaggerated sentiment of her mind and character.

The instincts of heroism, always strong in her, and that instinct to martyrdom ever dear to anything of womanhood, rose in her with irresistible force.

‘If Count Othmar ever heard that I did not tell, he would think it so mean and so false,’ she pondered, while the eager grip of the woman’s fingers closed on her and tried to pull her to the open side-entrance of the house.

She resisted.

‘No, no ; not so, not so ; not in secret,’ she muttered. ‘I wish to see my grandfather. Let me pass.’

‘Are you mad?’ screamed Catherine, dragging her backward by her skirts. ‘He is hot with brandy, I tell you ; you know what brandy makes him ; if he knows you have been off the island he will beat you. Has he not beaten you before, that you should doubt it?’

‘I do not doubt,’ said Damaris. ‘But it is only just that he should be told——’

‘I owe him everything, you know,’ she added, ‘and I did wrong to go away from home in his absence.’

‘Wrong! of course you did wrong. But you would listen to nobody, you were so taken up with those fine-folks. Of course you did wrong, but since the harm is done, and it is of no use to cry over spilt milk and broken eggs, get you into your bed; your grandfather will never know anything. Raphael and I, be sure, shall not tell. Get in and hold your own counsel. In the morning it will all be as one.’

‘No, it would not be fair,’ said Damaris.

Her face was very pale, but the exaltation of a romantic devotion to honour had come upon her, and gave her a strength not her own. She passed the figure of Catherine in the entrance of the scullery, and walked with firm steps through the stone passages, between the crowded bales of oranges and lemons, straight-way into the great kitchen, where Jean Bérarde sat. The light from an oil lamp which swung from the rafters shone on his strong, harsh, brown features, his grizzled eyebrows, his

white beard; the broad-leaved hat he had drawn over his face threw a dark gloom over the upper part of his features, and added to the natural hardness and fierceness of their expression. He had been running smuggled brandies successfully in his brig, a sport very dear to him, though prudence made him but seldom indulge in it; he had been drinking a good deal, and though not wholly drunk his temper was in readiness for any outbreak, like flax soaked in petroleum. He looked up from under his heavy brows at Damaris as she entered; the light and shadows were wavering before his sight, but he recognised her.

‘The woman said you were a-bed,’ he muttered with a great oath. ‘What do you mean—up at this time of night?’

The exaggerated scruples and the overwrought exaltation of the child made her brave to answer him. She came up quite close to him and looked at him with shining, steady eyes:

‘I am only now come home,’ she said in a low voice. ‘I have done wrong; I have been out all day.’

Jean Bérarde rose to his feet unsteadily,

and towered above her, a rude, savage, terrible figure ; his breath, hot as the fumes of burning spirit, scorched her cheek.

‘ Out ! ’ he echoed. ‘ Out ?—without my leave ? Out where ? ’

She looked at him without flinching. Only she was very pale.

‘ They came and asked me—the ladies and gentlemen—and I wished so much to go. I have never seen at all how those people live, and when I got there the hours went on, and I could not get back until he, Count Othmar, was kind enough to bring me home in his own boat, and he rowed himself all the way ; and he said that it would not be right for me to hide such a thing from you, because, though I have done no harm, yet I have disobeyed you——’

She paused, having made her confession ; she breathed very quickly and faintly ; her eyes looked up at him with an unspoken prayer for pardon.

In answer, he lifted his arm and struck her to the ground.

CHAPTER XV.

OTHMAR did not see his wife on the following day until the one o'clock breakfast, and then saw her surrounded with her friends.

When everyone had gone to their rooms after midnight he ventured to visit her in her own apartments. Her women were there; she did not as usual dismiss them; she looked at him with something of that expression which used to chill the soul of Platon Napraxine.

'My dear friend,' she said coldly as he greeted her, 'do not speak to me again as you spoke yesterday evening. It is not what I like.'

'I regret it if I spoke improperly,' replied Othmar. 'I was not conscious that I did. You had made a promise, and I reminded you of it. I was not aware there was any grave offence in that.'

'*C'est le ton qui fait la musique.* Your tone

was offensive. You may remember that I do not care to be reminded of anything when I forget it.'

'There is nothing praiseworthy in your sentiment,' said her husband unwisely; 'and it seemed to me that a promise made to a poor child, who could not enforce its fulfilment——'

She laughed unkindly.

'You kept my promise for me. I believe you accompanied her yourself. I dare say she preferred it. Really, my dear Otho, what can this trivial matter concern either you or me? The girl has gone back to her island. Let her stay there and marry her cousin.'

'I wish she may. But I doubt whether she will do so now.'

'Because you sailed with her across the sea? It was very wrong of you, though probably very natural, if you took the occasion to *conter fleurettes*!'

'I do not care for those jests from you to me. It is what you yourself have said to her which will have probably poisoned her contentment for the rest of her days.'

She yawned a little behind her hand and gave him a sign of dismissal.

‘Pray let me hear no more about her,’ she said coldly. ‘And if you will forgive me for saying so—I am tired—good-night.’

‘Will you not send away your women?’ said Othmar in a low tone, with a flush of irritation on his face.

‘No, thanks—good-night.’

He hesitated a moment, mastering a great anger which rose up in him; then he touched her hand coldly with his lips and left the room.

‘If she thinks she will be able to treat me as she did that poor humble dead fool——’ he thought with mortified impatience.

With the waywardness of human nature he wished for that mere human fondness which probably, he knew, had he had it, would have soon tired and palled on him.

As he went out from her presence now, he thought, he knew not why, of the girl Damaris. What warmth on those untouched lips! what deep wells of emotion in those darksome eyes! what treasures of affection in that faithful and frank heart! Poor little soul!—and the best he could wish her was to live in dull content beside Gros Louis.

Nadine heard the doors close one after

another, as he left her apartments, with a little smile about her mouth.

‘How easy it is to punish them,’ she thought; ‘and to think there are women who do not know how!’

The power of punishment was always sweet to her; it seemed to her that when a woman had lost it she had lost everything that made life worth living. She had not heard that he had accompanied Damaris home himself because she had not inquired about it, but she had guessed that he had done so. It was a silly thing to have done, exaggerated, quixotic; but then he had those *coups de tête* at intervals; he had always had them in great things and small; they made him poetic and picturesque, but occasionally they made him absurd. He seemed to her to have been absurd now; he could have sent the girl home with a gardener or a servant, with anybody who could handle a boat, if she must have gone home at all: she herself did not see the necessity. But a vague irritation against Damaris came into her as she sank to sleep between her sheets of lawn.

Une sensitive, une entêtée! If there were any two qualities wearisome to others were

they not those? No one was allowed to be either nervous or headstrong in her world. When she came in contact with either fault she was annoyed, as when gas escaped, or a horse was restive.

‘She has talent, and I would have aided her,’ she thought, ‘but since she is obstinate and thankless, let her marry Gros Louis and have a dozen children and forget all about Esther and Hermione. The world, on the whole, wants olives and oranges more than actresses, good or bad. Myself, I never understand why one should wish to see a play represented at all when one can read it; it argues great feebleness of imagination to require optical and oral assistance.’

The next day, however, when she saw Othmar she said to him with her most gracious grace and that charm with which she could invest her slightest word:

‘I think you were right, my friend, and I was wrong, about that poor little girl on her island. I did not behave very well to her. I sought her, and ought to have made her of more account. Shall I go and see her again, or what shall I do to make her amends?’

Othmar kissed her hand.

‘That is like yourself! You are too great a lady to be cruel to a little peasant. As for amends to her, I think the kindest thing you can do now is to let her forget you, and, with you, the ambitions which you suggested to her.’

She looked at him with penetration, amusement, and a little scepticism.

‘She is very handsome; do you wish her to forget *you*?’ she said with a smile. ‘I am sure you must have told her you will go and see her again.’

Othmar was annoyed to feel himself a little embarrassed.

‘I told her I would see her again some time, but I did not say whether this year or next.’

His wife laughed.

‘I was sure you did! Well, then, you can go and see her at once, and take her some present from me.’

‘If you will allow me to say so, I think a present will only painfully emphasise the difference of caste between you and her.’

‘You have *des aperçus très fins* sometimes!

That is a very delicate one, and perhaps correct, though a little pedantic. Well, go and see her, and say anything in my name that you think will smooth her ruffled feathers and restore her peace. I think we should have another Desclée in her ; but perhaps you are right, that it will be better to let her marry her ship-builder. Wait ; you may take her this book from me. That cannot offend her.'

She took off her table a volume of the 'Légendes des Siècles,' an *édition de luxe*, illustrated by great artists, bound by Marius Michel, illustrated by Hédouin, and published by Dentu, and in the flyleaf of it she wrote, 'From Nadège Fedorevna Platoff, Countess Othmar.' Then she gave it to her husband.

'I am certainly not going there to-day, nor for many days,' he said as he took it.

She smiled as she glanced at him.

'Are you sure you are not? Well, take it when you do go.'

'I shall go, if at all, only as your ambassador.'

'That is rather prudishly and puritanically put. Why should you not say honestly that the girl is very pretty, and that you like to look

at her? I assure you it will not distress me.'

'I could not hope that it would,' said Othmar rather bitterly, as Paul of Lemberg entered the room.

There were times when the serene indifference to his actions which his wife displayed found him ungrateful; times when he almost wished for the warmth of interest which the impatience of jealousy would have shown. Jealousy is an odious thing, a ridiculous, an intolerable, a foolish and fretful and fierce passion, which is as wearing to the sufferer from it as to those who create it; and yet, unless a woman be jealous of him, a man is always angrily certain that she is indifferent to him. Jealousy is a flattery and a homage to him, even whilst it is an irritation and an annoyance: it assures him that he is loved even whilst it wears and whittles his own love away. But jealousy was a thing at once foolish and fond, humiliating and humble, which was altogether impossible to the serenity and the security of the proud self-appreciation in which his wife passed her existence.

In a week's time she had forgotten that she

had ever seen Damaris Bérarde; but in a year's time Othmar did not forget that he had done so.

A few days later Loris Loswa was ushered into their presence; he had the sullen perturbed expression of a child baulked in its wish, or deprived of some toy.

'Loswa looks as if he had had an adventure,' she said as he entered. 'He is one of the few people to whom these things still happen.'

'I have been both shot at and nearly drowned, Madame,' replied Loswa. 'But that would not matter much if it were not that I have had also the greatest of disappointments.'

'Disappointment and assassination together are certainly too much in the same day for one person. Tell me your story.'

'I have been to Bonaventure,' said Loswa, and paused. He looked distressed and annoyed, and had lost that airy nonchalance and that provoking air of conscious seductiveness which so greatly irritated his comrades of the ateliers who had not his success either in art or in society.

'To Bonaventure, of course,' said his hostess, as she glanced at Othmar with a

smile. 'Everyone is going to Bonaventure; it will very soon see as many picnics as the Ile Ste. Marguerite.'

'Not if the tourists be received as I have been,' said Loswa, in whose tone there was an irritated regret which was not hidden by the lightness of his manner. 'Jean Bérarde is a madman. I took a little sailing-boat from Villefranche this morning, and bade them take me to the island. When we reached there, I left the boatmen on the beach and climbed the *passerelle* as usual, but I had not got halfway up the cliff before a bullet whistled past me, and I was warned that if I stirred a step farther I should be shot like a dog. I could not see who spoke, but the voice came from above. I replied that I was Loris Loswa, a painter from Paris, and that I merely wished to be permitted to finish a sketch which I had taken there a few days earlier. I presume that this was the worst thing that I could have said, for I received a second bullet, which this time passed through the crown of my hat. The person who fired was still invisible amongst the olives above. At the same moment some hands clutched my ankles so suddenly and forcibly that I lost my

footing and fell headlong down the ladder through the brushwood to the beach. I was stunned for a few minutes, and when I realised where I was, the man Raphael, mindful, I suppose, of the napoleons he had had, begged my pardon for having made me descend in such a summary mode, but said that, had he not done so, Jean Bérarde would have killed me. Raphael was in a great tremor himself, and urged me to go away on the instant, adding that "le vieux," as he called him, was resolute to shoot all trespassers without regard to rank or right, and had put a notice up to that effect on the rocks. "But it is against the law," I said to him. "Eh, monsieur!" said Raphael; "he is the law to himself here, and he is mad, quite mad—*un fou furieux*—since the little one came back from your friends. He has sent her away, heaven only knows where, and not a soul will be let to set foot on the island." "Sent her away?" I cried to him. "But I have not finished her portrait." The wretch did not care. "What does that matter?" he said. "What matters is that the one bit of gaiety and goodness in the place is gone? My children are crying for Damaris all the day

long." I used bad words about his children ; what did they matter to me? And I asked him how the old brute had learned that his granddaughter had been out that night : had he come home earlier than she? "Yes," said Raphael, "he did come home an hour before her, but he need not ever have known anything, for we would, all of us, have kept her little secret ; even old Catherine would never have told of her. But Damaris was always headstrong, and in some things foolish, poor child ; and she would have it that it was cowardly and wrong not to tell Bérarde herself ; and so, do what we would, she would go straight in and tell him ; and he—he had not had a good day's trade, and he had heard of a debtor who had drowned himself, and left no goods worth a centime, and so he was in the vilest of humours that evening ; and when she related to him what she had done, he up with his big elm staff and struck her down, and my wife and I thought she was dead ; and old Catherine was cursing, and the children were screaming, and the dogs howling. Such a scene ! such a scene ! However, she was not injured, and in the evening he took her away

by himself in the open boat, and what he did with her nobody knows. He made Catherine pack all her clothes in a great bundle, and so I do not think that he killed her. I suppose he took her to the mainland, to some convent perhaps, though he does not love them. I dare say he would have made away with Catherine too, only he wants her to cook his dinner, and he knows there is nobody else who can manage the bees." That was all that I could make Raphael say; he was in a great state of terror, and urged me to go away at once. He said the old man might come down on to the beach for aught he knew. As Damaris was gone, there was little to be gained by remaining, so I left the island. In returning we encountered a white squall; the boat capsized, we clung to her for half an hour, when we were picked up by a yawl which was going to Villefranche. That is all my story; I have been bruised and soaked, but all that would not matter if I could only finish my picture. But where is Damaris?'

'It is really an adventure,' said Nadine, 'and you have told it dramatically. As for your picture, you deserve not to complete it,

for you neglected her disgracefully when she was here.'

'I hope this old tyrant has not hurt her; but a ruffian who fires at one from his olive-trees as if one were a fox or a stoat——'

'Of course he will not hurt her; he will either keep her in a convent to punish her, or, as he does not love convents, marry her at once to her boat-builder.'

Othmar did not say anything; he had heard Loswa's narrative with regret.

'Poor, brave little soul!' he thought; 'and it was I who told her that it was her duty not to conceal what she had done.'

'A caprice may cost something sometimes you see, Madame,' said Béthune with a smile to his hostess.

'She may become a second Desclée yet,' said Nadine. 'Her grandfather will not be wise if he drive her to desperation. I am sorry he struck her: it was brutal.'

'Perhaps we hurt her quite as much,' said Othmar, which were the first words he had spoken on the subject.

His wife smiled.

'I know that is your *idée fixe*. I do not

agree with you. If she marry the shipwright she will now do it with her eyes open. It is always well to know what one is about.'

'You have made it impossible for her to marry the shipwright.'

'I really do not see why. Perhaps you mean your compliments or Paul's music.'

'Paul's music, and other things. You showed her the world as Mephistopheles showed Faust youth in a mirror.'

'Faust was, after all, Mephistopheles' debtor.'

'About that there may be two opinions.'

'After all, she would not have been punished if she had not spoken.'

'You must admire that at least. Courage is the only quality which you respect.'

'I admire it, but it was not wise.'

'What heroic thing ever is?'

He went away, leaving her presence with some irritation and some discontent. He knew that he had only said what was best for Damaris when he had counselled her to have no concealment from her grandfather; but the idea of the child's having suffered through his advice, the thought of her taken from her sunny happy

life amongst her orange-groves and honey-scented air, and all the gay fresh freedom of her seas, into some strange and unknown place—perhaps into some forced and joyless union—hurt him with almost a personal pain.

The wild rose had paid dearly for its one day in the hothouse.

‘Why could not Nadège let her alone?’ he thought angrily as he looked across the shining sea to the gold of the far distance, where westward the island which had sheltered the happy childhood of Damaris lay unseen.

CHAPTER XVI.

A FEW days later they left the coast for Amyôt and Paris. There was no record left of their visit to Bonaventure save the rough sketch which Loris Loswa had made, and from which he still meant some time, when he should have leisure, to create a great picture. One day Othmar bought the sketch of him at one of those exaggerated prices which Loswa could command for any trifle which he had touched.

When his wife saw it hanging in his room in Paris she laughed.

‘You are determined,’ she said, ‘that I shall not forget my *Desclée manquée*.’

‘I do not think you were kind to her,’ said Othmar.

‘I did not intend to be unkind, certainly. She gave me an impression of force, of talent, of a future: the sketch suggests that. But no doubt she has married the shipwright by this

time. Little girls begin by dreaming of René and Némorin, but they end in making the *pot au feu* for Jacques Bonhomme.'

'I do not think she will ever marry the boat-builder. I told you that we made it impossible for her.'

'I know you did ; but then you have always *des billevesées romanesques*. The steward at St. Pharamond could tell you what has become of her.'

'I have inquired. She has not returned to the island ; her grandfather never speaks of her, and no one knows anything at all about her.'

Nadine smiled.

'Ah ! you have inquired already ? I thought she impressed you very much.'

'Not at all,' said Othmar irritably, as he glanced at the sketch on which the sunshine was falling. 'But I was sorry that any caprice of yours should have cost anyone so dear.'

'Is that all ? And you are sure she has not married her cousin ?'

'They say not. He is still living at St. Tropez.'

'Then she must be shut up in some convent.'

‘Or dead.’

‘Oh no, my dear, she had too much life in her to die. Besides, her grandfather would have made her death known. I am sure she will live and have a history, probably such a history as Madame Tallien’s or as Madame Favart’s. She carries it in her countenance.’

‘Five fathoms of blue water were perhaps the better fate,’ said Othmar.

‘You are very poetic,’ said his wife with her unkindest smile. ‘I always thought you had a touch of genius yourself, only it never took speech or shape. You are a Dante born dumb.’

‘Then you should pity me indeed,’ said Othmar, with irritation.

He kept the sketch hanging in the room which he most often used at his house in Paris. It served to retain in his memory that night upon the sea when he had seen the figure of Damaris disappear in the moonlight, amidst the silver of the olive-trees, while the fragrance of the orange-scented air and the breath of the sweet-smelling narcissus were wafted to him from the island pastures out over the starlit waters.

‘You will end in falling in love with that picture,’ said his wife to him with much amusement. He was angered at the suggestion. His regret for Damaris was wholly impersonal.

‘We did her a cruel kindness,’ he thought sometimes when he glanced at it. ‘Wherever she be, and whatever she live to become, she will always carry a thorn in her heart, because she will always have the sentiment that she might have been something which she is not. It is the saddest idea that can pursue any one through life. Perhaps she will marry the boat-builder and have a dozen children, but that will not prevent her sometimes, when she sees a fine sunset, or sits in the moonlight on the shore waiting for the sloop to come in, from being haunted by the thought that if things had gone otherwise she might have been in the great world. And then, just for that passing moment, while the ghost of that “might have been” is with her, she will hate the man who comes home in the sloop, and will not even care for the children who are shouting on the beach.’

CHAPTER XVII.

THEY were again at Amyôt in the golden August weather, when no place pleased its mistress better than the cool and stately palace set upon its shining waters and stone piles, with the deep forests of France drawn in an impenetrable screen of verdure around its majestic gardens. She had a constant succession of guests, and a kaleidoscopic infinitude of pastimes. Great singers came down and warbled by moonlight to replace the nightingales grown mute; great actors came down also and played on the stage which had been built and ornamented by Primaticcio; every kind of ingenuity in novelty and diversion was exercised for her by cunning intelligences and brilliant wits. The weeks of Amyôt were likely to become as celebrated in social history as the *grandes nuits de Sceaux*; everyone invited to them received the highest brevet

of fashion that the world could give. Other people were immensely pleased and amused at Amyôt and at her other houses: she alone was not. Her intelligence asked too much; the whole world was dull and finite for her.

She had known the greatest triumphs, the highest heights of passion, the most voluptuous ecstasies, the most brilliant of successes, and they had all seemed to her rather tame, quickly exhausted. Faustina appeared to her as absurd, and commanded her sympathies as little, as Penelope.

Life's little round is all too short for satisfaction in it; it is so soon over; it is so crowded and so transient; to have children who may do less ill or do less well than we, to pursue aims or ambitions which have no novelty in them and little wisdom, to love, to cease to love; to dream and die; this is the whole of it, and the sweetest of all things in it are its childhood which is ignorant that it is happy, and its passion which is no sooner made happy than it pales and falls.

'If only life were like a play!' she thought. 'Any dramatist knows that in his last act his movement must be accelerated, and his inci-

dents accumulated, till they culminate in a climax. But in life, on the contrary, everything waxes slower and slower, everything grows duller and duller, incidents become very scarce, and there is no *dénouement* at all—unless we call the priests with their holy oil, and the journey to the churchyard behind the mourning-coaches, a *dénouement*. But it cannot be called a climax: the going out of a spent lamp is not a climax.’

Her lamp was far from spent; and yet a sense of the dulness of life, generally, often came to her. She had everything she had ever wished for, and yet it left her with a vague sentiment of dissatisfaction.

‘I wonder if he is really contented,’ she thought sometimes doubtfully of Othmar. It seemed to her quite impossible he should be. Why should he be when she was not? And yet there was no one she would have liked better or so well.

The sameness of human nature irritated her. Surveying history, it seemed to her that character, like events, must have been much more varied in other times than hers; say in the Fronde, in the Crusades, in the time of the

Italian Republics, even in the days of the Consulate, when all Europe was drunk with war like wine.

Nowadays people are always saying the same thing; entertainments resemble each other like peas; wherever the world gathers it takes its own monotony and tedium with it, and repeats itself with the dull perseverance of a cuckoo-clock.

She endeavoured to infuse some originality into her own society and her own pleasures; but she did not consider that she succeeded. People were too dull. Why was it? Nobody was dull in Charles the Second's time, or in the days of Louis Quinze, or of Henri Quatre. At Amyôt, if anywhere, she succeeded, but, though her invitations to the house parties there were passionately coveted, and everyone else was so exceedingly delighted with them, the utmost she could ever say was that she had not been too greatly bored. Modern existence was not dramatic enough to please her.

‘And yet if it be ever dramatic you say it is melodramatic, and ridicule it as *vieux jeu*,’ said Othmar to her once.

‘No doubt I do; one is not happily obliged

to be consistent,' she replied. 'We are too intellectual or too indifferent nowadays to have a Guise slaughtered in our antechamber, or an Orloff assassinated by our bedside, but the consequence is that life is dull. It is a journey in a *wagon lit*, one is half asleep all the time; it has no longer the picturesque incidents of a journey on horseback across moor and mountain, with the chance of meeting Malatesta or the Balafré en route.'

'Yet men have died for you!'

'Oh, my dear! they never did it with any picturesqueness at all! What picturesqueness can there be? A man falls in a duel; he is put in a cab with a doctor! A man kills himself with a revolver; there is again a doctor, and also, probably, a policeman!'

'Which does not prevent the emotions which lead to those incidents from being as genuine as they used to be.'

'I know that is your theory. It is not mine. The passions are nowadays all crusted with conventionality, like life. Look at ourselves, as I have said to you before.'

'Well? What of ourselves?'

'You and I think ourselves very original,

but in reality we are the servants of conventionality. I told you so last winter. When we were free and had the world before us, we could think of nothing more original than to marry each other like Annette and Lubin, like John and Mary. We had no imagination. We thought we should do all sorts of fine things, but we have not done them. We have merely just dropped back into the routine of the world like all other people.'

'I do not see what else we could have done,' replied Othmar, somewhat feebly as he was aware.

'What a conventional reply!' she said impatiently. 'That is just what I am saying. Neither of us had imagination, or perhaps courage, enough to strike out any new path, though we thought we were so much above other people. Both you and I have enough of originality to be dissatisfied with the world as it is, but we have not originality enough to create another one. People who have the perception which belongs to the poetic temperament, as you and I have, without its creative power, are greatly to be pitied. Both you and I have something of poetry—something of

heroism—in us, but it never comes to anything. We remain in the world, and conform to it.’

‘I would lead any life you suggested—out of the world if you pleased.’

‘Ah, but I do not please,’ she said, with a little sigh. ‘That is just the mischief. You remember when we went to your Dalmatian castle the first year; the solitude was enchanting, the loneliness of the sea and the shore was exquisite, the mountains seemed drawn behind us like a curtain, shutting out all noise and commonness and only enclosing our own dreams; but after a little time you looked at me, I looked at you, and we both tried to hide from each other that we yawned. One morning when there was a rough wind on the sea and the first snow on the hills, I said to you, “What if we go to Paris?” and you were relieved beyond expression, only you would not say so. Now, if we had been poets—really poets, you and I—we should never have quitted Zama for Paris. We should have let the whole world go.’

Othmar did not well know what to reply, because he was conscious of a certain truth in her words.

‘I am not a poet, you have often told me

so,' he said with some bitterness. 'The atmosphere I was born in was too thick and yellow with gold for the Parnassian bees to fly to my cradle. The supreme privilege of the poet is an imperishable youth, and I do not think that I was ever young; they did not let me be so.'

'You were so for a little while when you first loved me,' she said with a smile; 'that is why I wonder we had not more imagination at that time. Anybody could live the life we live now. It shows what a stifling, cramping thing the world is; we who used to meditate on every possible idealic and idyllic kind of existence have found that there is nothing for us to do but to open our houses, surround ourselves with a crowd, spend quantities of money in all commonplace fashions, and be hated by envy and envied by stupidity. Do you remember our sunlit kingdom in Persia that we were to have gone to together? Well, we are as far off it as though we were not together.'

'Do you mean then,' said Othmar impatiently, 'that you think our life together a mistake?'

'No, not quite that; because we are more intelligent than most people, only we have

been unable to rise above the commonplace ; unable to keep our iron at a white heat. Our existence looks very brilliant, no doubt, to those outside it, but in real truth there is a poverty of invention about it which makes me feel ashamed of my own want of originality.'

She laughed a little ; her old laugh, which always chilled the hearts of men.

She had always foreseen the termination of their pilgrimage of joy in that mortuary chapel of lifeless bones and motionless dust to which the lovers' path through the roses and raptures was so sure to lead. But he, man like, had been so certain that the roses would never fade, that the raptures would never diminish !

Othmar was sensible that he had in some manner failed to fulfil her expectations, and the sense of such a fact stings the self-love of the least vain and least selfish of men. Her life possessed all that any woman could in her uttermost exactness require. All the perfect self-indulgence and continual pageantry of life which an immense fortune can command were always hers ; her children by him were beautiful and of great promise, physical and mental ;

her world still obeyed her slightest sign, and her slightest whim was gratified; men still found the most fatal sorcery in her careless glance, and society offered to her all that it possessed. If this sense of disappointment, of disillusion, of dissatisfaction were really with her, it could only be so because he himself, as the companion of her life, failed to realise what she had expected in him—was unhappy enough to weary her, as all others before him had done.

A vainer man would have laid the blame on her, and have arrived, through vanity, at the perception that it was her temperament and not his character which was at fault. But all the flattery which every rich and powerful man daily receives had failed to make Othmar vain. His self-esteem was very modest in its proportions, and he attributed the fact of his wife's apparent indifference to him humbly enough to his own demerits.

‘I have not the talent of amusing her,’ he thought. ‘I have been always too grave—have taken life too sadly to be the companion of a woman of her wit. I have never done anything of which she can be very proud with

that sort of pride which would be the sweetest flattery to her; the years slip away with me and bring me no occasion, at least no capability, of the kind of distinction which she would appreciate. I cannot be a Skobelev or a Gortschakoff; I cannot make that renown which might arrest her fancy and please her *amour propre*; she has loved me possibly as much as she can love, but as she finds that I am made of the common clay of ordinary humanity, I become not much more to her than all those dead men whom she has tired of and forgotten.'

But whilst his reason told him this, his heart yearned to disbelieve it, and his pride refused a meek submission to it. There was something in her fugitive, delicately disdainful, capriciously insecure, which was certain to sustain the passion of man, because it constantly stimulated it; her concessions were made to his desires not her own; she never shared his weakness even whilst she was indulgent to it.

'I have absolutely never known yet whether you have ever loved me!' he said to her once, and she replied, with her little indulgent, mysterious smile:

‘How should you know what I do not know myself?’

It was a part, and no small part, of the ascendancy she had over him; it stimulated his affections, because it perpetually stinted them; it made satiety impossible with her.

Yet all which excited his passions and secured the continuance of her influence over him, left him more and more conscious of a void at his heart which she would never fill, because a nature cannot bestow more than it possesses. All the intellectual charm she had for him had a certain coldness in it; her incorrigible irony, her inveterate analysis, her natural attitude of observation and of mockery before the foibles and follies and affections of mankind, enchanting as they were, were without warmth as they were without pity. It was the brilliant play of electric light on polished steel. Sometimes, with the wayward inconsistency of human wishes, he would have preferred the glow from some simple fire of the hearth.

There were times when the feeling which met his own left his heart cold. He had never wholly ceased to feel that he was always in a measure outside her life. He would have

been ashamed to confess to her many youthful weaknesses, many romantic impulses which often moved him ; there were many lover-like follies which would have been natural and sweet to him, which he had early learned to control and dismiss, unyielded to because he was afraid of that slight ironical smile, and that contemptuous little word with which she had the power to arrest the quick tide of any impetuous emotion.

The excesses of passion and the force of emotion always seemed to her slightly absurd ; she had yielded to both for his sake more than she had ever thought to do ; but her intelligence always held reign over her with much greater dominance than her feelings ever obtained. There were moments when he felt as if he asked her for bread, and she gave him a stone ; a most polished stone of magical charm, of exquisite transparency, of occult power, but still a stone, when he merely wished for the plain sweet bread of simple sympathy.

Once, in riding alone through the forests of Amyôt, his horse put its foot in a rabbit's hole and threw him. He was unhurt, and rose and remounted. But he thought as he rode onward :

‘If I had been disfigured, crippled, made an invalid for life, how would she have regarded me?’

With pity, no doubt, but probably with aversion; certainly with indifference. She would have brought her exquisite grace, her cool nonchalant smile, her delicate fragrant presence to his bedside, and would have come there every day, no doubt, and have been careful that he should want for nothing; but would there have been the blinding tears of a passionate sorrow in her eyes, would her cheek have grown hollow and her hair white with long vigil, would her whole world have been found within the four walls of his sick room?

He thought not.

He sighed as he rode through the green glades of the great woods where she had held her Court of Love.

Of love no one could speak with such science and surety as she. She had known it in all its phases, studied it in all its madness, accepted it in all its sacrifices; on no theme would her silver speech be more eloquent; and love had been given to her as the widest of all her kingdoms. But had she

really known it ever? Had not that which her own breast had harboured always been the mere impulse of curiosity, the mere exercise of power, the mere chillness of analysis such as that with which the physiologist gazes on the bared nerves of the living organism? After all, why had men cared so much for her? Only because she had been as unmoved as the moon. Men are children; they long for what they cannot clasp. He himself had only loved her so long, despite the chilling and dulling effect of marriage, because he had always felt that he possessed so little real hold upon her that any day she might take it into her fancy to leave him, not out of unkindness but out of *ennui*.

Sometimes he thought with a curious compassion of Napraxine. He thought of him now, and for a moment his own heart grew hard against her as he rode through the beautiful summer world of his woods; hard as had grown the hearts of men who, dying for her sake, had felt that they had given their life for a smile, for a jest, for a chimera, for a caprice—given it away unthanked.

But then, when he entered his house again and saw her, he forgave her and loved her; he

cared more still for one touch of her cool white hand, the favour of one careless smile cast to him, than he cared for the whole world of women—women who would willingly have seen him forget his allegiance to her, and have consoled him for all her defects.

‘Otho is uxorious, like Belisarius, like Bismarck,’ said Friedrich Othmar, with an unpleasant smile. ‘And alas! he is neither a great soldier nor a great statesman, to make the weakness respected either by the world or by his wife.’

Othmar had overheard the speech, and it had made him irritated, and afraid lest he ever looked absurd.

‘Yet,’ he thought bitterly, ‘if she were still the wife of Napraxine, no one would ever see anything singular in any weakness or madness that I might commit for her!’

Between his uncle and himself few intimate words ever passed. After the death of Yseulte a tacit understanding had been come to between them that neither should ever name those causes, whether great or small, which she had had for pain and jealous sorrow in her brief life’s space. It was a subject on which they could never

have touched without a breach irrevocable and eternal in their friendship.

Friedrich Othmar visited at their houses, caressed their children, preserved all outward amity with both of them, and devoted all the energies of his last years and of his immense experience to the interests of the house which he had honoured, served, and loved so long, but with neither his nephew nor his nephew's wife did he ever pass the limits of a conventional and courteous intercourse, which had neither affection in it nor any exchange of confidence.

Once or twice the worldly-wise and harsh old man did a thing which a few years before, in anyone else, he would have regarded as the most flimsy and foolish of sentimentalities. He took the little Xenia with him into the gardens of St. Pharamond, and made her gather with her own small hands a quantity of violets; then he led her to the tomb of Yseulte, and bade her lay them on it. She had been buried there, though a sepulchre sculptured by Mercier had been raised to her memory at Amyôt.

‘Why are you not her child?’ he said to her. ‘Why are you not? She would have

loved you better than your own mother can.'

The child scattered her violets, then came and leaned her arms upon his knee and looked up at him with serious eyes.

'You are crying!' she said, touching softly two great tears which had fallen on his cheeks. Then she added gravely: 'I thought you were too old!'

'I too should have thought so,' said Friedrich Othmar bitterly. 'It is a sign that my end is near.'

And he envied those credulous, unintellectual, happy imbeciles who could believe that that 'end' was only the opening of the portals of a wider, fairer, greater life; he whose reason told him that for his own strong keen brain and multiform knowledge and accumulated wisdom and fierce love of life, as for the youthful limbs and the fair soul and the pure body of the dead girl there, that end was only the 'end' of all things: cruel corruption, hideous putridity, blank nothingness, eternal silence. -

'What is the use of it all? What is the use?' he said to the startled child, as he took

her hand and led her from the tomb. What was the use of any life or any death? What had been the use of Yseulte's?

One day he found before her mausoleum at Amyôt the most *mondaine* of women: Blanche Princesse de Laon, who, in her childish days, had been Blanchette de Vannes.

'You, too, remember her?' he said in surprise.

Blanche de Laon replied roughly:

'I loved her;—*tout le monde est bête une fois!*'

She stood before the marble sepulchre where Mercier had made the angels of Pity and of Youth weeping. She was not twenty years of age, but she knew the world like her glove. She was cruel, cold, avaricious, sensual, steeped in frivolity and intrigue as in a bath of wine, but underneath all that there was one little spot of memory, of regret, of tenderness in her nature; as far as she had been capable of affection she had loved Yseulte.

'*Tiens!*' she said, as she stood beside the sepulchre. 'Do you think it has succeeded—your nephew's last marriage?'

'I believe so,' replied Friedrich Othmar

with surprise. 'Yes, certainly, I should say so; they seem quite in accord; he is devoted to her still.'

'*Tiens!*' she said again, and she struck the marble of the tomb sharply with the long ivory stick of her sun umbrella. 'I watch them like a cat a mouse. I will be even with her still; the first time there is a little crack in what you call their happiness, I shall be there—and I will widen it. Have you seen the drivers of Monte Carlo make an open wound in their horses' flank on purpose? Well, this is how they do it. A fly settles and leaves a little piece of braized skin, the men rub that little place with sand, it widens and widens, they rub in more sand, the sun and the flies do the rest.'

Then she struck her ivory stick once more on the marble parapet of the great tomb.

'She died for them! She was so foolish always. But there was something great in it. We are not great like that. If he only remembered, I would forgive him for her sake. But he never remembers. He does not care. A dog might be buried instead of her.'

'You cannot be sure of that.'

'Bah! I am perfectly sure. He has never

even understood that she did die for him. He thought it was an accident !’

‘Hush !’ said Friedrich Othmar harshly, but with great emotion. ‘She wished that he should think it so ; what right have you or have I or has anyone in the wide world to betray her last secret if we guess it ? It has gone to the grave with her, like her dead children.’

‘I betray it no more than you !’ she replied with asperity. ‘I have given no hint of it to any living soul ; when Toinon said it was a suicide I struck her, I made her hold her peace. I was a child then, and all these years since I have never said a word ; but you, you know ; you know as well as I.’

‘It was not a suicide, it was a heroism. If there were a God, a great God, He would have honoured it.’

‘But there are only priests !’ said Blanche, with her bitterest smile.

They turned away together from the mausoleum, where the marble figure of Yseulte seemed to lie in the peace of a dreamless sleep beneath the shadowing wings of the two angels. Gates of metal scroll-work let in the sunlight to this house of death ; there was no darkness

in it, no terror, no melancholy ; white doves flew around its roof, and white roses blossomed at its portals.

‘Madame la Princesse de Laon,’ said Friedrich Othmar gravely, as they passed across the turf, ‘whenever the fly begins that little wound in the skin that you talked of, forbear to widen it for the sake of your cousin who sleeps there ; do not make her sacrifice wholly useless. What is done is done. We cannot bring her back to life, and if we could she would not be happy in it. There are souls too delicate and too spiritual for earth. Hers was so.’

Blanche de Laon gave him no promise. She walked on over the smooth sward through the labyrinths of blossom, and crossed the gardens where her courtiers met her, with outcries of welcome and of homage.

She was at the supreme height of coquetry and triumph and fashion. She was not beautiful in feature, but she was dazzling fair, had a marvellously perfect figure, *une crânerie inouïe*, and the advantage and fascination conferred by an absolute indifference to all laws, hesitations and principles. She was hard as

her own diamonds, plundered her lovers with a greed and ruthlessness which rivalled any *cocotte's*, kept her splendid position by sheer force of audacity as high above the world as though she were the most pure of women, and before she had completed her twenty-first year knew all that was to be known of the refinements of vice, the exaggerations of self-indulgence, and the eccentricities of unbridled levity. She had supreme scorn for her sister Toinon, who had espoused the Duc de Yprès, a hunting-noble of the Ardennes, and who spent most of her time in the provinces chasing wolves, bears, and wild deer, and could give the death-blow with her knife to an old tusked monarch of the woods or a king-stag of eleven points, as surely as any huntsman in French Flanders or the Luxembourg.

The Princesse de Laon came as a guest to Amyôt with most summers or autumns. She knew that her host disliked her, and would willingly, had it been possible, never have seen her face ; she knew that his wife disliked her scarcely less, but that knowledge increased her whim to be often at their houses, and she never gave them any possible pretext to break

with or to slight her. Her name was included, as a matter of course, in their first series of guests every season, and usually she was accompanied by Laon himself; a man of small brains and admirable manners, who adored her, and would no more have dared resent the liberties she took with his honour than he would have dared to enter her presence uninvited.

‘J’ai étudié vos moyens de punir votre meute,’ she said once to the châtelaine of Amyôt, with a malice equal to her own. *‘Et je les ai imités ; tant bien qué mal !’*

She was the only person in whom Nadine had ever found her equal in high-bred insolence, in merciless raillery, in unsparing allusions, couched in the subtleties of drawing-room banter or of drawing-room compliment. Blanche de Laon was the only one who could fence with those slender foils of her own, which could strike so surely and wound so profoundly. Blanche de Laon, outwardly her devoted admirer and friend, was the sole living being who could irritate her, could annoy her, and could make her feel that Time, to use the words of Madame de Grignan, robbed her

every day of something which she would never recover and could ill afford to lose.

Before this insolent youth of Blanchette she, who had been Nadège Napraxine, felt almost old.

She was not old; she was still at the height of her own powers to charm. She proved it every day that she drove through the streets, every night that she passed down a ball-room. Still Blanchette, twelve years younger than she, reigning in her own world, repeating her own triumphs, awarding the cotillion to her own lovers, made a certain sense of coming age approach her. Age was not at her elbow yet, but she saw his shadow in the doorway. She forgot that approaching shadow at every other time, but Blanchette had the power to point it out to her in a thousand ways imperceptible to all spectators. Hundreds of other young beauties grew up and entered her society, and met her daily and nightly, and she never thought once about them, except when she wanted them for a costume quadrille at her ball in Paris or tableaux vivants at Amyôt. But Blanchette forced her to think of her; forced her to

see in her a rival, perhaps an equal, in those kingdoms where she was wont to reign alone. Blanchette, when she let her myosotis-coloured eyes gaze at her, said to her with cruel pertinacity and candour :

‘ You are a beautiful woman still, but you owe something to art now ; you will have to owe more and more every year ; you would not dare be seen at sunrise after the cotillion now ; soon you will dance the cotillions no longer, but your daughter will dance them instead of you. How will you like it ? You have too much *esprit* to be Cleopatra. You will not give and take love philtres at forty. You will have too much wit. But when your empire passes you will be wretched.’

All this the blue keen eyes of Blanche de Laon alone of all women said to her, anticipating the years that were to come, asking in irony—

‘ How wilt thou bear from pity to implore
What once thy power from rapture could command ? ’

This is the question which every woman has to ask herself in the latter half of her life. A woman is like a carriage horse ; all her *beaux jours* are crowded into the first years of her life ;

afterwards every year is a descent more or less rapid or gradual ; after being made into an idol, after living on velvet, after knowing only the gilded oats and the rosewood stall and the days of delight, she and the horse both drift to neglect, and hunger, and rainy weather, and the dull plodding world between the shafts. The horse comes to the cab and the cart ; the woman comes to middle age and old age ; he is ungroomed, she is unsought ; he stands in the streets dumbly wondering why his fate is so changed ; she sits in the ball-room chaperons' seat silently chafing against the lot which has become hers.

Men are so fortunate there. The very best of their life often comes in its later years. If a man be a poet, a soldier, a statesman, all the gilded laurels of fame are reserved for his later years ; honours crowd on him in his autumn as fast as the leaves can fall in the woods. Even as a lover it is often in his later years that his greatest successes and his happiest passions come to him. This is always what creates the immense disparity between men and women. For men age may become an apotheosis. For women it is only a *débâcle*.

This will always cause disparity and discord between them. When love has said its last word to her, it is still weaving all kinds of first chapters to new stories for him. Nobody can help it. It is Nature. The fault lies in the ordinances of modern civilisation, which have made their laws without any recognition of this fact, and indeed affects altogether to ignore its existence.

She said such things as these in jest very often ; but beneath the jest there was a sorrowful and impatient foreboding. The days of darkness had not come to her, but they would certainly come. Having been in her way omnipotent as any Cæsar, she would see her laurels drop, her sceptre fall, her empire diminish. A woman holds her power to charm as Balzac's hero held the *peau de chagrin* ; little by little, at first imperceptibly, then faster with each hour, it shrinks and shrinks until one day there is nothing left—and life is over.

Life is over : though the automatic joyless mechanism of living may go on for half a century more.

It is useless to say that the affections will compensate for this decadence. They will do

no such thing. As intelligence is more and more highly cultured, and taste made more fastidious, the power to console of the ties of family grows less and less ; the mind becomes too subtle, the sympathies become too exacting and refined, to accept blindly such companionship or compensation as these ties may afford.

Every woman who has had the power to make herself beloved has known a height of ecstasy beside which all the rest of life must for ever look pale and dull. You say to a woman, ‘ When your lovers fall away from you, console yourself with your children.’ It is as though you said to her, ‘ As you can no longer have the passion-music of the great orchestras, listen to the little airs of the chamber harmonium.’

While your lover loves you he is all yours ; you are his sun and moon, his dawn and darkness, his idol, his lawgiver, his ecstasy—what can compensate to you for the loss of that power? Whether time or marriage or other women kill that for you, whenever it goes utterly, you are more beggared than any queen driven from her kingdom naked in winter snows, like Elizabeth of Hungary. And it always goes ; always, always ! We reach

the height, but we cannot stay at it. We live for a few instants with the stars, then down we drop like stones.

So she would think at times ; and the presence of Blanche de Laon had power to recall and emphasise such thoughts more irritatingly than had that of any other woman. In a thousand hinted insolences, couched in bland phrase, Blanchette again and again reminded her that '*le jour est aux jeunes.*'

The day was indeed still her own, but twilight was near.

It was the Princesse de Laon's fashion of vengeance—pending any other.

Blanchette had known very little emotion in her twenty years of existence, hardly any pain except that of some ruffled egotism or some denied caprice. She had been a woman of the world to her finger tips, from the time of her infancy, when she had been curled and frizzed and dressed in the latest mode to show her small person in the children's balls at Deauville or at Aix ; but when she had heard of the death of her cousin, and realised that she would never hear the voice of Yseulte again on earth, she had known a grief more violent, a

regret more sudden and sincere, than her vain and self-absorbed little life could have been supposed capable of in its inflated frivolity and egotism. With her intuitive knowledge of human nature, she had divined the true cause of that death, and into her small cold soul there had entered two sentiments which were not of self: the one an imperishable regret for her cousin, the other an imperishable hatred of Nadine Napraxine.

Others forgot: she did not.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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